

lang="en">

Great Merchant - Chapter 00-11

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Prologue 1

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Prologue 1)

Remember how I said I was going to be working on something with a friend months ago and then he disappeared on me? Well, he's back, sorta, he's still stuck in the boonies somewhere in China-Not-China, but he finally got internet and is alive, so I'll be doing this original series on the side with EC as the main. This seems to be a LOT easier to deal with since it's strictly traditional chinese unlike the triple whammy that is EC, also a lot less headache and way less research required (at least I hope so, everything I read so far I knew right away without needing to look it up, so \o\ \o/ o huzzah!). Now if only I can somehow get him to do the web design with his potato over there >.>

Without further ado, here's 財神 - 道明 / Great Merchant - Dao Ming

“No! Let me go! I’m innocent, it’s all those peasants’ fault! I’M INNNOOCCCEEEEEENNNNTTTTTT!”

A deep voice screams for an appeal, to no avail as it’s dragged into one of the numerous passages to the left of the stern-looking man sitting cross-legged on an elevated pedestal behind a low-rising table. On top of the pedestal sat a man with eyes closed, his headpiece standing erect, with its two rounded rectangle winglets in perfect position.

“““Huuuoooooooooooo”””

[T/N: The “elevated pedestal” is referring to that raise platform where the judge sits at with his table and is above everyone else in the court. ~~It LITERALLY doesn’t have an English word to describe it despite our efforts in trying to search for one.~~ The English Architectural term is Chancel, sadly, it’s **only** used in religious (namely, Christian churches) floor plans. Just think of it as a little stage with steps where the judge works on, for those that watched Bao Zheng or period dramas that features magistrates, it’s that part where the servants step up onto to give something to the judge.]

Dadadada

Amidst the droning hum of the guards and the rhythmic pounding of their rods against the ancient stone floor court, a scholar holding a golden scroll and an elegant brush pen calls out “Next!”, bringing in the next person to be judged.

A handsome figure dressed in an immaculate green and gold robe is pushed into the court, just before the pedestal where the steel-faced judge sits - who finally opens his eyes to stare down at the new arrival.

“Name?” The scholar asks without looking up from the scroll as he crosses out the previous name.

“High King Illanis (Ye’lan’lik’si).” The tall man with long, pointed ears answers in an aloof tone.

“Name?”

“Are you deaf? I said I’m High King Illanis, Leader of the Great Elves of Plamor’an (Pa’lam’or’an), Protector of the Hundred Million Li Forest.” The man extrudes a domineering demeanor at the judge-secretary before him.

The judge-secretary sighs softly while shaking his head, slowly lifting his right hand before dropping it. Immediately, four guards armed with lacquered rods step forward from the side of the court, their space immediately filled in by their comrades. Without the need for further command, one strikes the tall man in the guts, the second strikes him behind the knees, the last two cross their rods from behind the man’s head and pin him to the floor in a kowtow position. The entire series of action took less than two seconds as though it’s routine to them.

“Alik’a’na Mosa (A’lai’ca’na Mo’Sa), is that correct?” The judge-secretary reads from the scroll indifferently, causing the man to scowl.

“How do you know my name?! Is this some sort of human sorcery?!” The man’s scowl turns into suspicion as he struggles to get up, only to be mercilessly pinned

by the guards.

“This is the Afterlife, you’ve died and are awaiting judgment by King Yanlou.” The judge-secretary folds the scroll before placing it into the same hand that’s grasping the brush pen, cupping his hands and bowing slightly towards the man sitting silently on the pedestal.

“Afterlife...? But I was... my bedroom... isn’t the Afterlife in the Ethereal Forest?” The man stammers while his eyes shift back and forth.

“Ah, the Ethereal Forest, amazing place, I went there for a work-vacation, that place is nothing short of a paradise. If you qualify, I’m sure King Yanlou,” he cups his hands and bows once more, “will surely accommodate you.” Shifting his shoulder a bit, the man unfurls the scroll once more before reading from it.

“Alika’na Mosa, lifespan eight hundred seventy nine years plus fifty seven years... Ruled his people impartially, allowing for unprecedented expansion of the Plamor’an Duchy into an unrivaled Empire that controls 3/5th of the Osiris (Ao’sai’li’si) star. Oh my... this doesn’t look good.” The judge-secretary shakes his head slowly. “Responsible for the death of 129,788,877,183 souls... oops, make that seven hundred and fourteen.”

[T/N: Since it isn’t quite clear and people have asked, and even our editor didn’t know, I’ll make a note here. The XXX year +/- YYY years means. XXX = actually lived years, YYY = years different from the pre-ordained date of natural death.]

King Yanlou’s facial expression turns even more stern, questioning the elf without saying a word.

“There’s no way I... wait... you mean you include those damned humans and lizard savages?!”

The judge-secretary nods once, “those are included in the figure.”

“I killed the humans in the name of justice! They enslaved our kind and treat

them as livestock!”

“Even those that came to offer your people succour while being hunted? Including the allies that fought with you and your men shoulder-to-shoulder?”

“They are traitors to their own kind, it’s merely a matter of time before they stab us in the bah-!” The elf’s words slurs near the end, as his tongue feels numb all of a sudden.

[T/N: This is a two part reference to King Yanlou, in folklores within the CJK region, King Yanlou hate liars. Children are told that King Yanlou will come remove their tongue if they keep lying.

“You know that wasn’t the case, you were just too lazy to deal with an Allied Kingdom and wanted a Vassal State after the war.”

“Pah! So what if I did, they would do the same as me given the same position!” The elf shifts his eyes away and looks to the side.

King Yanlou closes his eyes without saying a word.

“Then what about the Lizardmen?”

“What about them?! They are just savages wrecking our precious forest! Their overpopulation was turning the forests back into filthy swamps, wetlands and plains.” The kneeling man turns his head and stares at the unmoving judge with hatred in his eyes. “By what right do you judge me by, huh?! You lot should be thanking me for saving you additional work! I saved millions of lives by annexing those lands and reforesting them!”

King Yanlou’s hand picks up the commandment tablet and slams it onto the table, his stern face turning into a scowl. Soon after, trails of blood drip from the elf’s mouth.

[T/N: And here’s part two of that reference.]

“Oh, by the way, King Yanlou rreeeeeeeeaaaaaaalllllllllyyy hates liars, especially unrepentant ones. Those lizardmen were simply returning the landscape to its natural state as was determined by their shamans. You, on the other hand, just wanted increased living space and food production at the cost of everything else. You know that hundred billion plus number? A third of that is elves that are dead and dying because of the ecological disasters your willful policy has made. Aside from your ongoing massacre against the landkeepers, you are killing your own people.”

[T/N: This is why I need an editor, seems like this part needs a T/N since it gave him a wtf moment. Forcefully converting land into forests can indeed cause ecological disasters. You are literally changing the water cycle, the biomass make up, providing fuel for uncontrollable fires, etc... When a disaster strike, it will strike HARD. You don't have the natural barriers that would otherwise be there. *I.e.* With swamps, wetland and barren plains, they act as natural fire buffering zones. Natural watersheds and so forth.

“Wait, what?” The anger in the man's face is replaced by confusion, then shock as he recalls the numerous reports that were trickling in. His eyes are shifting left and right, panic starts to seep in as he looks at King Yanlou's face. “That isn't my fault, how was I to know this would happen?!”

“WILLFUL IGNORANCE DOES NOT EXCUSE YOU FROM YOUR ACTIONS, BEGONE! 14TH CYCLE, 3 DEMERITS.” King Yanlou's booming voice reverberates within the hall of the court.

“Wait! 3 demerits? What did I do wrong?! What's the 14th cycle?!” The man struggles and asks while the guards are dragging him up.

“You should have asked yourself what you did wrong before. You could've also asked when I asked for your name and read out your deeds. Here's a hint, not that it would help you, King Yanlou hates liars, especially ones that can even lie to themselves to justify their actions.” The judge-secretary shakes his head softly. “The 14th cycle is the samsara of domestic beasts, you will either be a beast of burden or something raised to be consumed. Complete your lot in the next life, I hope you can achieve some merits in the life after that.” The man tilts

his head forward slightly to the side.

The four guards starts dragging the once mighty elf king toward the 14th passage on King Yanlou’s left, the elf’s screaming appeal echoing continuously before finally fading away.

The court resets itself as though nothing has happened.

“““Huuuoooooooooooo”””

Dadadada

“Next!”

A scrawny, yet scholarly white-haired man steps forward into the court, his lean figure is obvious as his rough, hempen robe dangles off of him. He cups his hands and bows to both the sitting judge and the judge-secretary respectively, his demeanor neither servile or arrogant, just a sincere, unadulterated respect to one’s equal. His body emits a sort of quiet dignity.

“Name?”

“Surname Li, secular name, Fang Sing.”

“Li Fang Sing, lifespan... Nineteen minus eighty-two...? Responsible for...” The judge-secretary’s voice drops off as he quickly expands the scroll endlessly, wordlessly reading the text in a trancelike state.

“Ah... this must be the Afterlife then. Guess I failed...” The young man gives a wry, bitter smile as he looks slightly downcast. "I will lessen the trouble for you various magistrates. You can just send me straight to Hell.” He cups his hands once more, resignedly bowing his head in deference.

Translator's Note: King Yanlou is probably better known as King Enma by those of you that read Japanese series (also known as the King of Hell).

Translator's Note 2: I will be ~~stealing~~ borrowing RWX's method of translating names as in English (+original chinese phonetics in these brackets) for the first time it appears.

Prologue 2

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Prologue 2)

“THAT IS FOR THIS COURT TO DECIDE, WE WILL BE FAIR AND IMPARTIAL TO EVERYONE, FROM THE LOWEST SCUM TO THE GREATEST JADE EMPEROR.” King Yanlou’s voice booms out once more, as he turns his head slightly towards the man reading the scroll.

“Heh, if only we had your kind of judge back home.” The young man’s bitter smile deepens, mocking the corrupted officials from his country in his heart.

“Silence, you may talk when you defend yourself or have anything to add.” The judge-secretary walks up the steps to the pedestal, scroll in hand as he places it onto the low-rising table in front of King Yanlou and whispers into his ears. The secretary’s brush pen hovering above the scroll, moving to different parts every now and then.

“LI FANG SING, YOU CRIPPLED YOUR NEIGHBOUR’S ARM AS A CHILD OVER A MERE DOG, WHY?” The booming voice rattles the table, his face stern.

“It wasn’t intentional, but I did it nonetheless. I can’t remember the exact details, but he was torturing the dog for no reason whatsoever, then it somehow ended up with me breaking his left arm.”

“YOU ENDED UP KILLING THE SAME DOG THREE YEARS LATER, YOU CRIPPLED SOMEONE IN THE NAME OF PROTECTING THIS DOG, YET YOU KILLED IT WITH YOUR OWN HAND, ISN’T THAT RIGHT?”

The young man’s eyes go vacant as though he can see the past event playing before his very eyes, a silence follows as he nods his head. “I killed it to feed my family and myself, the village was going through a famine, yet the officials still wanted the regular tax on the crops. I won’t say that what I did was right, but I

don't regret it, otherwise someone in my family would've surely died."

The judge questions no further, the judge-secretary walks down from the pedestal and takes over. "Then why did you kill your benefactor, who lifted you up from serfdom and into his household?"

The young man stares at the man, an incredulous look on his face. "Shouldn't you people know all this already? Why do you need to ask?"

The judge-secretary gently lifts his brush pen up before dropping it softly into his other hand. "Just answer the question."

"The man is a two-faced shrew, I was groomed by him to be a sacrificial lamb for his corrupt dealings. After finding out the truth unexpectedly, I simply did what I had too to stay alive." The young man answers with an even voice, as though it had no impact on him then, and has no impact on him now.

Before the judge-secretary can continue his questioning, the young man continues onto something else. "I took over the post held by that beast that wasn't fit to be either a pig nor dog. Afterwards when I became of age at 16, I worked tirelessly to enrich the country's coffers, make the citizens' lives easier, making my way into the Royal Inner Circle within 2 years."

The young man takes a few steps, looking at nowhere in particular, yet having a look as though he's staring into the distance. The two magistrates look on patiently, waiting for him to continue. "I thought the Heavens is just, that the man with the Mandate of Heaven would rule righteously. Then I saw the truth. That dog-king seeks only pleasure, increasing his harem whenever possible. It doesn't matter if the woman is a girl, or that she's already married, he will have his way. The Queen is no different, ever jealous -using other womenfolks to vent her anger-, she enacts policies in the name of equality. Men and women are fundamentally different! Even those women with the same body types as the men simply can't keep up! But does she care? No! Women get sent to the mines with the men, same with conscription! And when quotas aren't met, or the army

fails, the womenfolk get flogged until they are crippled!” A disdainful look appears in the young man’s eyes.

“That doesn’t give you the right to usurp the Decree of Heavens and end the Royal line.” The judge-secretary inserts flatly.

“The sons and daughters are no better! Treating the commoners as toys, having their pets ‘play’ them to death. If this is the Decree of the Heavens, then PAI!” The young man spits with disgust. “The Heavens is a sham!”

[T/N: You will notice the use of Heaven and Heavens, they are both one and the same, but this is due to remaining artifact from older translators. In all cases, they are singular when used like this (different from the Judeo-Christian-Islam Heaven.)]

The young man’s resolute declaration stuns the magistrates and completely floors some of the guards.

Sensing the silence, the young man continues. “I know my crimes, given the choices, I will do the same things all over again! Let’s just end this charade and send me to Hell already!”

King Yanlou picks up the commandment tablet, lifting it up in the air. “WE NEED TO DISCUSS PRIVATELY, BRING HIM TO THE ROOM OF MEDITATION IN THE MEAN TIME.”

SLAM

“““Huuuoooooooooooo”””

Dadadada

The guards hum while hitting their rods rhythmically onto the ancient stone floor once more. A pair of guards stands to the left and right of Li Fang Sing, guiding him into a crystalline room filled with light before leaving him there.

The numerous guards in the courtroom file out in an orderly manner, leaving only the two magistrates inside, as a ghostly film of light swirls across the exits and surfaces of the room, isolating the two from the rest of the universe.

King Yanlou picks up the scroll laid out on the table, staring at the numerous lines written on it. With a wave, he pushes one end of the scroll off the low-rising table, causing it to bounce off the pedestal and onto the floor. The scroll continues endlessly into the distance, the size of the wounded part at the end never seems to shrink.

“Your Excellency.” The judge-secretary cups his hands and bows slightly before offering his advice. “Since this man defies the Decree of Heavens, he should be dropped into the lowest level of Hell... I know he’s unrepentant, but look at all these pleas for leniency on his behalf...” The man walks up to the exposed scroll laying on the floor.

“Even the dog he killed pleas for him... it was mutilated with a crippled leg as a pup, yet the young man kept it alive, gave it a home, companionship, a purpose and even brotherhood. It was fated to die young, yet it had a life span of one plus four years. It can be said that it gained fourfolds its life! This is almost unheard of for a soul in the realm of the beasts!”

“YOU CAN STOP PLEADING FOR HIM.” King Yanlou closes his eyes and stroke his long beard in contemplation.

“But surely we can be lenient! Look at all these souls, Realm of Beast, Realm of Men, and even Realm of Seekers, all of them advanced in their karmic cycle because of him!”

“YOU ARE MISUNDERSTANDING ME, LIN BAI.” The judge opens his eye slowly, trying to find the words to convey his thoughts properly.

The judge-secretary has a questioning look as he fiddles with the brush pen in his hand.

“HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED HERE?”

The man frowns slightly at the unexpected change of topic, but answers it nonetheless. “I’ve worked for Your Excellency for 1,344,971 years.”

“DO YOU KNOW THE PURPOSE OF OUR JOB HERE?”

Lin Bai’s face drops as he goes into deep contemplation. “I thought we judge the souls that pass through here, and then send them to their next incarnation... But since you are bringing it up, it shouldn’t be just that...”

King Yanlou gives a firm smile, nodding slowly a few times. “SAMSARA, THE ENDLESS CYCLE OF LIFE AND DEATH, IF IT’S JUST AN ENDLESS CYCLE, THEN WE WOULDN’T NEED TO BE HERE.”

The judge-secretary’s eyes widen like that of a cow’s, as though he’s on the edge of enlightenment.

“WE DON’T JUDGE THE SOULS THAT ARRIVE HERE, WE MERELY GUIDE THEM.”

King Yanlou’s booming voice seems to completely fill the man’s mind, which is already working in overdrive in anticipation. “SAMSARA, ISN’T AN ENDLESS CYCLE. IT’S THE METHOD USED TO CULTIVATE THE SOUL. THE CEASELESS CYCLE BRINGS EXPERIENCES FROM THEIR NUMEROUS LIVES, REFINING THEIR CORE SOUL. BE IT THE MOST BENEVOLENT GODS OR THE CRUELEST OF DEMONS, THEY ALL HAVE TO GO THROUGH THIS PROCESS.”

“Then...” Hope fills Lin Bai’s eyes, as he truly doesn’t want that young man to be removed from Samsara and thrown into one of the Hells.

“BUT, EVEN I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF THIS.” King Yanlou stretches his right hand out, causing the end of the scroll far into the distance to fly into his hand. “A MERE 999 REINCARNATIONS AND HIS SOUL ALREADY REACHED ENLIGHTENMENT IN A PATH OF THE ENDLESS GREAT DAO. YET, THE SOUL DOES

NOT YEARN FOR IMMORTALITY, TELL ME, WHAT REALM CAN WE SEND THIS SOUL TO?"

"So that's why you..." The man can only shake his head as his understanding catches up with him. "Ah! We can do this instead!" Lin Bai makes a bright smile at King Yanlou as he flourishes his brush pen, with a clear proposal in mind.

[T/N: There's a part here that confuse Ishman somewhere in the chapter, I had no problem with it, the people I asked irl has no problem with it. So it might be a westerner thing. If any of you find anything "strange" here, please limme know so I can try out Ishman's alternative version.]

Prologue 3

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Prologue 3)

Inside the Room of Meditation

“Please wait here, General.” A pair of guards respectfully guides a fat, bald, ruddy old man into the crystalline room. “We will prepare your carriage right away.” They cup their hands and bow deeply before leaving the room.

“There’s plenty of time, take it slowly, take it slowly.” The old man waves his right hand lazily as he struts into the room. “Eh? There’s already someone here?” He looks over at the other side of the large room, spotting a white-haired man sitting cross-legged in the corner, spots of glistening light trailing from his eyes, down his face. The old man swings the rake he’s holding over his left shoulder, causing the few possessions he has dangling off the rake to jingle, making his way over.

“What are you in here for, sonny?” The old man jokingly asks.

The young man opens his eyes, giving them a quick wipe with his sleeve before getting up. He cups his hands and bows slightly, “Greetings, elder.”

“Hoho, dispense with all the useless formalities, life is too short for that! Oh, wait, we are already dead, so it doesn’t matter anyways. Hahahaha!” The old man lazily waves it off, makes a joke and starts laughing by himself. The young man smiles politely at him, nodding once before sitting back down.

“Why the long face lad? Ah... I know!” The old man sits down across from the young man, laying his rake and bundle of things carefully on the ground. He clumsily reaches into his sleeves, retrieving two wine cups. “Hmm... I guess Hui Mong Wine would be good right about now.” The old man reaches into the bundle at the head of his rake, retrieves a gourd with practiced motion, then he

fills the two cups from up high, without splashing a drop.

[T/N: The wine name is Returning (to) Dream 回夢]

“Here lad, help yourself.” He slides the small wine cup expertly to the young man, it stops perfectly in front of him, with the surface of the wine completely tranquil the entire way. The old man takes a long sip of the wine in his hand, inhaling deeply. Seeing that the young man is looking at the cup with a neutral expression, the old man slaps his knee.

“Drink, drink! Wine only tastes better when there are others to drink it with you!” The old man stops drinking for a moment and thinks. “Ah! You are afraid of drinking without foundation eh, don’t worry, this old geezer’s got you covered.” He puts the wine cup on the floor, flicking his sleeves before bringing his hands together before moving expertly while humming a mantra. Multiple beads of light with various scenes in them float in the air. “Hmm... let’s go with, this, this, oooh, roasted swan leg, definitely that.” The old man would say this and that out loud, sometimes with the name of food thrown in, each time he does so, he will reach towards one of the beads, which would grow larger into the size of his head when he reaches into it, before grabbing out some food.

[T/N: “Foundation” is my take on 打底. It’s a common folk-belief that you ought to eat something before you drink, as to enjoy it more without getting dead drunk right away.]

The young man looks on in astonishment, his previous thoughts vanishing like smoke.

“Eat, eat, better to be a satisfied ghost than a hungry ghost. Hahahaha!” The old man grabs a roasted piece of large swan leg and starts taking big, delightful bites out of it after his hearty laugh.

“Then I won’t be polite.” The young man nods at the old man, a small smile creeping into his face as he partakes in the unexpected feast before his eyes.

...

...

...

“Aiyah! What the hell is the Heavens doing? Don’t worry lad, you won’t be going to Hell, I will drag you back out myself if I have to! Well, maybe let me take a nap or something before hand. Hahahaha!” The old man laughs heartily once more, his face red from the alcohol, with bits of food and grease on his face. His face turns serious all of the sudden, his eyes opening wide. “I mean it, you might have to stay there for a few days, but I will come get you! If I don’t show up, one of my brothers will!”

The pair started talking while they were eating, as the alcohol flowed, the atmosphere changed. Small talk turns into arguments about food and wine, then onto women, and then onto more serious topics. The two feel like old friends that haven’t seen each other in a long time, despite the obvious age gap in their appearances.

“You might not believe me, but big brother used to be a prankster when he was young, he didn’t grow up until we ended our pilgrimage with our master!” The old man looks around to make sure no one overhears. “Well, I say that, but none of us really grew up if you know what I mean! Hahahaha!”

The young man had experienced the ruthless power struggles of the Royal Court. Despite his short lifespan, his insight into people’s character has been honed and sharpened to an unbelievable degree. In addition, he innately sharp mind and clear, unclouded, unbiased observation skill allows him to see through most people. But the jolly old man in front of him completely baffles him. He forcefully suppresses the hope in his heart and accepts his fate.

“I thank senior for his kind intentions, but you don’t have to exert yourself for this criminal.” The young man places his wine cup onto the floor before respectfully bowing to the old man with cupped hands.

Unexpectedly, the old man slams his wine cup heavily onto the crystalline floor, pouting like a child, with the red cheeks to match. “There are crimes, and then there are ‘crimes’. If what you did is a crime, then Heavens is a sham!”

The old man then quickly fills his cup up once more before angrily biting into a piece of mutton. The young man sits stunned, never expecting the same words he said to King Yanlou to be repeated by someone else. His heart fills with warmth and gratitude, even if the old man is merely humouring him, he’s already extremely happy to have someone like this to accompany him on this last leg of his journey.

“You know, if you want, I can bring you to another Domain for a few incarnations. It only started a few thousand years ago, so some of the recent souls that came through here have been diverted there as well.” The old man puts down his hands for a while before sighing. “I always thought there was something wrong with Heavens, but I didn’t know how to put it into words. But some recent friends I made gave me some new insights after all these years.”

“Heh, if there’s something wrong with Heavens, then who would want to stay? One lifetime of facing off the darkest of corruption is enough.” The young man laments.

“Good!” The old man lifts his hand that’s now holding a drumstick before stuffing it into his mouth, his hands making numerous incantation gestures, causing the space to ripple. “I will be sending you to Star Number 5354.” The old man says with gusto, the drumstick no longer in his mouth, the bone has been placed on the floor at some point in time. “I bid you good journey!” The entire space seems to shake, blurry, ghostly images of the old man seem to overlap upon themselves. The various food on the floor, the gourd, and a dull, copper bracelet intended for a child, are wrapped up in a giant fan made out of banana leaves before shrinking in size, flying straight into the young man’s dantian.

[T/N: I loled for a bit and people were giving me weird looks xD 星號 五三五四 is literally translated to Star Number 5354, but it is also the homonym for “Nonsense”.]

“Senior! Wait! What is your name?!” The young man shouts as he feels himself being pulled to... somewhere.

“Just call me the ‘Heavenly...’ no, call me the ‘Earthly Tumbleweed’! Hahahaha!” The old man laughs once more as the world goes black for the young man. The old man’s figure distorts, like a mirage, the appearance melts away, revealing a hideous thing with the body of a man and the head of a pig. Unperturbed, the figure grabs more food from the beads of light, grabbing another wine cup and wine gourd from somewhere, before enjoying himself with a smile on his face.

“General! Your carriage is ready.” The pair of guards from before returns, with their ever respectful gesture.

““Eh?!”” The two of them look at the hideous figure walking toward them.

“Good! Lead the way!”

The guards give each other a questioning look, wondering why the General stopped using his transformation ability. They didn’t hesitate for long however, before they quickly guide the pigheaded General down the hall.

Back in King Yanlou’s Court

“Terrible news! Terrible news!” A pair of guards runs back into the ancient court room after going to retrieve the soul that was sent to the Room of Meditation. The pair runs to the center of the court, kneeling in front of King Yanlou, shaking like tree leaves in a typhoon.

“Calm yourself!” The judge-secretary shouts at the two. “What happened?!”

“The... the... Li Fang Sing is gone!”

“But... that’s impossible!”

“It’s true!”

The pair of guards and Lin Bai turn to look at King Yanlou, who slowly closes his eyes. After a few moments, he picks up the commandment tablet. “FATE BEYOND FATE, DAO WITHIN DAO. THE COURT IS ADJOURNED!”

SLAM

Everyone else in the room opens their eyes wide in shock, some even pick at their ears, wondering if they heard right.

“I SAID, ‘THE COURT IS ADJOURNED!’”

The judge-secretary is the first to recover. “Next!”

His voice acts like cold water, splashing onto the still dreaming guards. They all recovered with a few hiccups, resuming their duties.

“““Huuuoooooooooooo”””

Dadadada

[T/N: I’m not sure how many of you are familiar with Journey to the West/Saiyuki/even Dragon Ball. But the references in this chapter is extremely thick. The old man in question is Zhu Bajie (the pig demon with the nine-tooth rake), after completing the pilgrimage with his master, everyone but him became a buddha. He was honoured and given the role of “Cleaner of the Altar”, since he’s lazy and loves to eat, so he got rewarded with the task of eating all the leftovers from offerings. He’s also depicted as a soft hearted, compassionate being with the power of transformation, willing to give even demons second chances at danger to himself and his group. As for the name he gave to the MC, “Earthly Tumbleweed” -personally I would’ve chosen another name, but there’s already precedence so I’ll go along with that-, it’s based on his former title cum nickname as a Celestial General, the “Heavenly Tumbleweed”. **TL;DR: The old man is actually the Pig Demon from Journey to the West.**]

Prologue 4

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Prologue 4)

Prologue 4

A spiraling black hole appears thousands of meters up in the violet, swirling sky, shortly after, a young man with white hair drops out of it.

The young man opens his eyes at the sudden scenery, realizing his predicament.

“Oh shit! AHHH!!” The man can only scream and flail as he starts to fall.

“Oh, would you just shut up?” A figure appears next to the young man from nowhere, plucking him up by the neck and stops his descent. It releases its hand after the young man stops struggling.

“Eh... what the?” The young man looks left and right as he floats in the air.

“Um... Thanks.” He turns and cups his hands to the figure, which turns out to be a guard dressed in ceremonial armour.

“Didn’t they explain you can fly at the Dispatch Counter? Damn bastards must be slacking off again.” The guard rolls his eyes in exasperation. “Alright, just get in your line and wait your turn.”

“Um... what line?”

“Huh?! The line for the Domain and World you will be reincarnating into! Where’s your registration paper?”

The young man starts looking around, unsure of what’s going on.

“Don’t tell me you lost it?!”

“Umm... I don’t know the name of the Domain, but I was told it was made in the last few thousand years and I was supposed to head to something called Star Number 5354?” The young man offers sheepishly.

“That’s probably the Domain of the Endless Seekers then... 5354 eh...” The guard pulls out an ornate clipboard before flicking his fingers on it. “What is your name?”

“Li Fang Sing.”

“There you are... What the hell?! They didn’t even fill in which office was responsible for you!” The guard snaps his head away from the clipboard and stares into space in a particular direction, gnashing his teeth. “Alright, follow me, just walk normally.” Without waiting, the guard turns around and walks toward the floor. Countless lines sprawl across the barren, twisted landscape, like the grain on an ancient piece of lumber. Wordlessly, the pair approaches a comparatively short line in the distance, the people in line can be vaguely distinguished, like ants harvesting nectar. Many were the same size, with the odd few that are bigger, smaller, some with wings, some with horns, others with different features.

“Delivery! Delivery for Li Fang Sing!” A large, translucent kite chirps while pulling a cart stall with a lantern hanging with the word “Deliver” on it. Hearing that, the guard turns around and waits patiently for the bird to pull up next to them.

“Li Fang Sing?” The bird’s head stares at the young man, its head jerking and stopping at different angles.

“Yes? That’s me...?”

“Good, good, press thumb here.” The kite waves its right wing, a clipboard appears out of nowhere in a shower of light. The young man presses his thumb onto it as asked. The kite waves its left wing shortly after, whereupon the

clipboard is replaced by 3 satchels. “Thank you, thank you.” The kite coos before grabbing the satchel labeled ‘For the Netherworld Deliverymen’ with its beak as it starts running off into the distance, chirping ‘Delivery! Delivery!’.

[T/N: The references are SO HEAVY, that I’ll be adding T/N quite a bit, especially for our western audience. When buddhists in the CJK region burn their offering to the dead, they often burn a small bundle of spirit money for the delivery as ‘tip’. As for the kite, it’s a symbol of Garuda, this ‘might’ relate to the fact that whenever an offering is burnt, a wild gust of air would come and scatter the ashes to ‘collect the offering’ and bring them to the dead. I’m not that big of a buddha scholar, so forgive me if I get this reference wrong.

“Woah, looks like you aren’t going to be a Yamaduta anytime soon.” The guard comments before starting to walk again.

[T/N: Yamaduta are the Messengers of Yanlou/Yama/Enma, they are spirits that no longer receive offerings thus getting no spirit monies, having to work it off ya know, no freeloaders!

Fang Sing puts one of the satchels into the breastpocket inside his hempen robe while inspecting the other satchel as he walks. The satchel is made with rough cloth, obviously intended to be durable as opposed to being cheap. There’s a small strip of silken cloth on it with the name ‘Li Fang Sing’ on it along with his thumbprint, the words ‘Letters and Offerings’ printed along its side. He lightly pulls on the string of the satchel, wondering what it’s about. A sudden deluge of mental images filled with the entire inventory of the satchel floods his mind. Fang Sing quickly closes the satchel, with the images fading right away. He tucks the satchel away and takes out the other one, inspecting it. It look identical to the earlier satchel, save for the words ‘Spirit Money’ replacing the text next to his name instead.

“Oy, oy, come on, look at that when you get in line, it isn’t like you won’t have time for it.” The guard calls towards the young man as he noticed Fang Sing slowing down behind him.

“Ah, sorry, coming!” The two make their way to the end of a line after a while without incident.

“Alright, get in line, wait for your Mapo Soup and you will be reborn after

drinking it. This line is really short with the Domain being new and all, but most people normally read the stuff sent by the living to pass the time. Good luck.” The guard turns to fly away after giving a curt comment.

“Brother hell-warden! Wait!”

“Eh, what now?!” The man turns back with a slightly irritated tone of voice.

Fang Sing reaches into his robe and then pulls out a Spirit Coin, offering it toward the guard with both hands. “This little gesture is to thank you for helping me.”

“Hahaha!” The guard laughs before taking the coin and slaps the young man on his shoulder. “I like you! You have some manners!” He looks back and forth a bit, as though he’s making sure of his surroundings. “Alright, here’s some advice, the Domain you are going to is a convergence of all the other Domains, so I recommend you buy some Karmic Enhancement for Physicality with your Spirit Money if you have any. But even if you don’t, don’t ever sell your own Karma for Spirit Money, those merchants are rip-offs. Same with any artifacts, currency is actually pretty common since the living often send them down, but artifacts from offerings are really limited, so they are priceless.”

“Domain? Karma Enhancement? Artifact?” The young man tilts his head, not completely understanding what has been said.

“Um... Domain is eh...” The guard brings out the clipboard again, flicking his fingers once more. “Okay, you are from the Green Jade domain. So it’s like this, a Domain is like a Kingdom, it rules a certain area. Each Domain has numerous worlds, think of it like your cities. The various Domains make up ‘All of Existence’, with each Domain having certain features. You, for example, came from the Domain of Green Jade, which is ruled by a Jade Emperor who focused more on enlightenment than technology. There are many strange Domains like the Domain of Three Thousand Worlds which has been ruled by a weird twine of a demon lord and hero pair, Domain of the Sovereign Planes where the Overgod

rulers merely maintain their realm and their worlds are flat, Domain of the Thousand Suns where technology reigns, with space-faring in metal behemoths as the norm, Domain of the Azure Dream where you've got souls that come in many different forms and can utilize energy in the form of magic and so forth."

[E/N: huehuehue T/N: these references to other series]

The young man listens carefully, as these different concepts of worlds completely overwhelm his mind. Magic? Spacefarers? Demon Lord? Overgods? His mind feels numb, but he has to listen and try to retain it nevertheless. One never knows when a seemingly trivial piece of information can affect one's life.

"As for Karmic Enhancement... well, it's something you can buy with Spirit Money to alter your next reincarnation, making you stronger, smarter and so forth. But these Enhancements are only temporary and won't be carried with your soul to your incarnation, so it's just something to make your next life easier. Your Karma on the other hand is permanent, it's what you had gained throughout your lives, if you sell that, you will be losing the connections you made and experiences you lived, in short, you will be literally selling yourself." The guard makes a serious face, "I repeat, don't sell it."

Fang Sing nods showing that he's taking that advice to heart.

"As for Artifacts... well, since you only got what... only 999 incarnations, you probably haven't even seen one. Don't worry about it, you will know when you get one anyways." The man looks up, spotting something in the sky. "This is all I can tell you, good luck!" The guard flicks the coin into a rapid spin before catching it in his hands as he walks away.

[T/N: Blame Ishman for all these T/N T.T. "Catching it in his hands" is referring to a trope used in asian media for a trait of someone slightly greedy happy to earn a small profit where they toss it up and claps the coin in their hands. E/N: I'mHelping.jpg It'sallonfire.jpg]

The young man cups his hand and bows to the retreating figure, before turning and joining the line in front of him. The line moves very slowly, as it crawls ever

so lazily closer to the front, some of the Souls in the line start talking to each other out of boredom. Others would read letters in their hands with various expressions. Likewise, Fang Sing has also been reading the individual letters he received.

A faint smile appears on his face, it seems his old friends and allies succeeded after he died while hiding in the wagon. The coup was a success and the country was stabilized before the other kingdoms caught wind of it and attempted an invasion. The ones that move him the most were the numerous letters with weird, nonuniform lines and symbols mixed in with a few simple words that came with offerings of common wildflowers and plain steamed buns. These were obviously from the peasants, the fact they can even offer steamed buns to him and attempt to write is a sign that the country is improving. While in deep thought, a singing voice caught his attention.

“One single life, two attachment, three eight twenty four, four sour dough.” A short, pockfaced man pushes a stall cart along the line, singing a nonsensical, lamenting song. “Karma! Get your Karma here!”

[T/N: This is... IIIIIIMMMMMMMMMPPPPPPPOOOOOSSSSSSSSSSSSSIIBBBBBLLLEEEE to translate right. It's a funny rhyme thing based on numbers. One (counter) Life, Two (counter) Attachment (like husband and wife, or dependants), Three Eight is slang for “nosy”/”stupid”, Twenty Four is nonsense, but 3x8 is 24 from the 9x9 timetable song, so... yeah. Four Sour Dough is 4 dead corpse or similar. Just think of it as a funny, nonsensical singalong.

“Oy! Merchant! You sell any food?!” A pig-faced creature five spaces ahead of Fang Sing asks.

“Eh, why the hell would you need food as a ghost? Piss off!” The short man keeps pushing the stall as no one seems to be interested.

“Um... If you don't mind, I can trade you some?” The young man sticks his head out and asks.

“Eh? Really?”

“Yep, hm... how does some White Cut Chicken on Rice sound?”

“Don’t know what that is, is it good?” The creature tilts its head to the side.

“Oh, ah, here.” The young man pulls out a large bowl of white rice topped with poached chicken, the bright yellow skin of the chicken glistens with a luster with some garnishing on top. “It’s this.” The creature snorts and takes a deep breath as he walks out of the line, quickly patting himself, reaching for something.

“You’ve got a deal!” The creature hands over a battleaxe before quickly grabbing the bowl and starts stuffing his snout into it. The young man looks at the heavy axe in his hand before putting it into his satchel with a shrug. The trade itself isn’t really important, since his benefactor had also said that a ‘Satisfied Ghost is better than a Hungry Ghost’ and he certainly agrees with that statement after eating his fill.

“Hey, buddy, you’ve got any more of those weird food of yours?” A man with a horse body inquires as he watches his friend eating the food like a bear after hibernation.

[T/N: The original for “” is “like he hadn’t eaten anything in his life” which is a common idiom/slang... but it doesn’t carry well in english considering they are dead and ppl not familiar with it will get the wrong impression.]

“Sure, how about a Buddha’s Delight?” Fang Sing pulls out a vegetarian dish with mushroom and tofu.

“Yoink!” The horseman swaps for the dish and replaces it with a bow and starts pigging out next to his friend.

It didn’t take long before others in line started requesting things, and as though it caused a chain reaction, other Souls from Domains that have a practice of sending food offerings to their dead also started trading with their neighbours. In the process, Fang Sing learns that these creatures are from different Domains or different parts of the same Domain of Green Jade where he originated. There are Orcs, Minotaurs, Centaurs, Elves, Dwarves, Squidmen and numerous other

creatures, which greatly broaden his horizon.

As the line had gotten lively, the wait didn't seem as long. One group after another soon disappears, as they reach the old woman stirring a pot and scooping out the fluid into a bowl. Soon, it was Fang Sing's turn.

“‘Being Drunk, you are still 30% awake.’ The next time you wake up, you will be as a babe. Drink it and walk into the portal there.” The woman's eyes are pure white as though she's blind, yet, she gives the feeling that she can see more clearly than anyone here. Her gnarly finger points toward a swirling black hole directly behind her.

[T/N: 'Being Drunk, you are still 30% awake.' is transliteral since... we can't think of an equivalent. It's pretty much means even if you are drunk/dreaming, you are still somewhat aware. It reads really smooth in Chinese, sadly, only in Chinese >.>]

The young man did as asked and drinks the so called Mapo Soup, which smells faintly of alcohol. As he walks into the portal, his world turns blank.

Chapter 1

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Chapter 1 - Cursed Child, Beloved Child 1)

I was supposed to finish EC first... but this one is just so easy, literally half the length. Although Ishman swears it's more like 1/8th or something >.>
I will try to get EC up tomorrow or the day after, without further ado, enjoy~

A youth dressed in a beige, monastic robe lazily lies sideways on a large, flat boulder next to a quietly murmuring, magnificent river, with his left leg casually crossing over his right. His head is propped up by his right hand, his elbow providing elevation, his left hand draping down the side of his body, the very depiction of relaxation as the figure sleeps under the shade of a willow tree, with the sun blazing at its zenith in the sky.

An idyllic village near the edge of the forest

“Come on! One! Two! Pull! One! Two! Pull!”

A slightly taller child shouts loudly as he leads a handful of children in pulling a rope, causing the pulley over the well to rattle.

“Almost there! One! Two! Pull! One! Two! Pull! Alright!”

At the side of the well, there are several pails that are slightly smaller than the children, all filled with water. Woven basket and other containers can also be seen, stacked slightly out of the way.

[T/N: Damn you buggers, damn Ishman T.T Okay, the bucket includes the handle, so the kids aren't superhuman with crazy strength okay? If any of you visited Mong Cai in vietnam or Suchou in China, you will see these kind of pails for drawing well water. The handles make up the top third of the bucket.]

“““Thank you, Big Brother Tong!”””

The child called Tong nods, “Hurry home and come back, we still have to cook the congee.”

“Yes!”

The children split into 3 pairs leaving the youngest one behind, before sticking a pair of sticks into the handles of the buckets and lifting it between them.

Normally, a person would use a single stick as a carrying pole to carry two buckets of water, but since the children are small and weak, they have to use two sticks to keep a single bucket from rocking back and forth and spill all the hard earned water as they carry a bucket to each of their homes. The children carefully waddle their way, careful to not spill a drop of the water.

“Little Ming, what’s next?” The oldest child looks at the youngest, asking for direction.

The scrawny kid turns and looks up at the overcast sky before turning his head towards the forest, an endless rattling of the leaves can be heard as he stares at them with his clear, bright eyes. “There will be rain tomorrow.”

“Is it going to be a storm?”

The kid, whose head barely reaches the torso of the other, shakes his head.

“Heavy shower.”

“Good, we will get some buckets and bowls out and catch some rainwater then.”

Little Ming turns his head toward one of the numerous fruit trees before looking at the grass. He has always been a child of few words, some of the villagers - including his parents-thought that he was retarded. He would often stare at the clouds, the trees, the grass and even the livestock, ignoring the people around

him for the most part. Other children, even the adults, mocked him, calling him names and occasionally throwing filth at him; Tong was amongst them when he was younger. But after getting lost in the forest with his friends, something that can easily be a death sentence due to the various predators, he was located by Ming who was riding on his father's shoulder at the time. It was the first time Ming talked so much, that's also why his father humoured him and followed his instructions. It was only after the incident that his parents and a handful of villagers understood the fearsome wisdom within that quiet, small body. Ming was merely five years old when all this happened.

The young child had repaid enmity with kindness, the realization of the truth made the Tong at that time feel insignificant. He was the second son of the chief, yet with all the privileges he had over the other kids, all he had to show for it was his pointless pride and his ability to lord over and bully others. It was a lesson that even his parents hadn't taught him, and it shook him to his core. He soon realized that the kid was probably the brightest one in the village, perhaps even smarter than the elders. There were no teachers in the village, he himself only learned various things because his father taught him along with the occasional tutors that showed up every winter. He then recalls the lonely looking child staring intently at the clouds and the plants, if... just if... he wasn't daydreaming, then that means he's observing the minute details of nature. This would be the so called 'Heaven is the teacher, the entirety of Nature is the guide' that his tutors would say offhandedly to praise some eccentric geniuses of the past.

To Tong, Ming is already a genius. The current epidemic with the Scarlet Hive further expounded this view within his heart, if it wasn't for Little Ming's unusual actions last year, the infected villagers and their children would've probably died a week ago. He asked his parents to start rationing food, to save enough extra food to last an extra two months in the winter. At first, the parents ignored him as he was still growing, without adequate food, he will not grow up healthy. With no other option, he cut down on the amount of food he himself consumed, eating nothing more than a handful every meal, saving even his parents' share. After persisting for about a month, his parents yielded and started rationing their food. At the same time, Ming warned others to save up food as well, but he

gave that warning only once.

Prior to the emergence of the Scarlet Hive, stories told by the elders states the epidemic will run its course after four week's time, with most of the death occurring within the first two weeks. This is an illness that is something that appears once every few decades, it has an 80% mortality rate amongst the population, regardless if it's commoners or nobility, there is no known cure for this disease. The unique feature about this disease is that it always appeared during early Spring, just after Winter has ended. The disease primarily targets adults only, with children merely developing nothing more than a cold. But the timing of the disease is also what causes it to be so lethal. Without the adults, the children will simply starve to death as each region will be quarantined when a breakout occurs. The lack of food is the most severe during this period of time, without the adults to hunt and forage for food, it would be a slow, agonizing death for the young survivors.

“Right, we will prepare some food for tomorrow, since we shouldn't come out in the rain. I'm going to let the other teams know, are you going to be alright by yourself?”

The small child nods, walking forward to pick up a branch and starts to carefully dig into the grass before using it like lever, causing the soil to turn. Small purplish bulbs peek out from the soil, Ming drops the branch after spotting them, then squats down and carefully removes the dirt, extracting the entire plants without damaging them.

Tong turns and leaves as he sees the kid already starting his work. He bites down hard on his teeth, repeating “Three more days. Three more days. Three more days.” like a mantra as he walks toward another part of the quarantined village, letting the others know of the impending weather.

Three Days Later, Village Square

“Wi-Will this really save my dad?” One of the children asks Tong as his father is lowered into a large, ceramic vat that was used to hold rice wine in the past. The vat is lined with a yellow-ish brown, grainy paste with a poignant smell.

Tong in turn looks at Ming who replies. “One in Two chance.” He pauses for a moment as he removes a medicinal clay pot from the fire, carefully tilting the pot so the liquid slowly flows out of the elongated, tilted handle into a bowl. “Make him drink it.”

“AUURRRRGGGHHHHH!!” The man screams and writhes within the vat, trying to get out. The red splotches on his skin audibly crackles as scabs form over them.

“Keep him in there.” The child says indifferently as he prepares the next batch of herbs to be boiled.

“NO! Let him out! Let him out!” The man’s child pulls everyone around the vat away, dragging his father out of the vat with tears in his eyes.

“Waste of effort.” Ming retrieves the prepared bowl and puts it next to the fire to keep it warm. “Those who don’t want their parents to be treated, don’t bring them here.”

Numerous children start to bawl as the decision weighs on them like a mountain, some of the children clench their teeth in determination, a few others are asking others to help them bring their parents here quickly. The other children who are bearing crude stretchers with the ailing adults on them hear the message and react similarly. Ming walks up to the latest arrival, which contains his mom and dad.

“Father, drink this.” He carefully feeds the medicine into the burly man’s mouth, the man’s face twisting in disgust as he tries to spit it out, but Ming tightly wraps his hand around his father’s mouth and head, forcing it down. “I know it tastes horrible, but it’s medicine. Please, drink it.” He resumes feeding the medicine, the man once again makes a disgusted face, but he no longer struggles as he

swallows it down. Afterward, with the help of Tong and another older kid, they carry the man into the vat.

“URRGGH!!” The man lets out a grunt of pain and writhes in pain.

“This is going to hurt, but it’s to seal all the hives.” The small child explains as he reaches into the vat and starts smearing the paste underneath his father’s clothing. The man claws at the wall of the vat until he finds the rim, gripping it with white knuckles.

It was at this time that a monk with a full body robe and muslin face veil approaches from the distance, a Monk’s Spade on his shoulder with a small wrapped package dangling off the back end. In his left hand, a prayer bead is continuously being rolled by his thumb. ‘Na Mo Em It Tuo Fo’ being repeated as he walks. The mantra stops as his eyes refocus from their dullness, staring at the odd spectacle in the supposedly dying village.

[T/N: 南無阿彌陀佛 -> Na Mo Em It Tuo Fo, it’s a mantra used in buddhism to drive out idle thoughts, also used as an opening phrased used in popular culture for addressing crisis, ward off disaster and to give ones condolences depending on what they add to the mantra.]

Chapter 2

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Chapter 2 - Cursed Child, Beloved Child 2)

“Ah! Master Monk is here!” One of the children resting on the side of the path spots the monk approaching from the desolate main road, immediately calling for others’ attention.

The children bow their head slightly to the monk before resuming their task, the ones that are currently resting look at the monk with hopeful eyes. The monk straightens his left hand vertically, resting his thumb over his heart, returning the greeting. The prayer beads in that hand didn’t sway one bit in the process.

“Master Green Wisteria.” An elderly man walks toward the monk, his back hunching slightly, his hands dyed in a brownish yellow hue, similar to his robe.

“Na Mo Em It Tuo Fo, well done, **well done.*” The bald monk, with a contemplative look behind the muslin veil, bows slightly in greeting. The monk has done a mass burial for a different village more than a decade ago - that suffered the same epidemic, where it has only just started recovering. According to the records in his sect, the innumerable villagers would fall in despair each time this disease appeared. This is the first time he has seen villagers themselves trying something to combat the disease, this was something that was only previously done by Physicians, Sages, Saints and Immortals.

[T/N: 南無阿彌陀佛 善哉善哉 is the phrase often used in buddhism, where 善哉 is pretty much meaning “Very Good/Excellent/Well Done” praising or encouraging good karmas, deeds and so forth. But... he chose to use 善災 which sounds the same, but has a different meaning which translates into “Good\Kind\Charitable\Gentle Disaster”. I thought it was a typo at first since it was written as “南無阿彌陀佛, 善哉善災” as 哉 and 災 are homonyms. Then I remembered that the fucker is a cheeky bastard that makes offhanded puns like that even in email replies -- So for all intent and purpose, everyone else aside from the monk hears it as “well done, well done”, when only he himself knows that he said “well done, (implying/hoping that this will be a) gentle disaster”. I can’t go with either literal translation nor a localized adaptation, hence this lengthy T/N to explain this T.T]

“The Village Chief isn’t here right now, but I will guide you to the guesthouse for the time being.”

“I will be troubling you then.”

The elderly man and the monk make their way to the guesthouse silently, a tacit agreement has been passed down since time immemorial. Visiting monks with Monk’s Spades are undertakers for any villagers in their practice of charity through labour, thus must be treated with respect and provided with shelter and if possible, food. Aside from appearing twice a year, they will also appear when there’s a natural disaster or an epidemic, such as the case now. Either through the means of ‘Divine Protection’ or through ‘Arcane Knowledge’, there has never been a case where a monk suffered from nor contracted an illness through burying the dead, thus they are one of the few exceptions that are allowed to enter quarantined zones.

The children continue to carry the adults to the village square as the two figures fade, applying treatment for the adults whose children wanted it. The younger children who can’t bear the stretchers would take turns retrieving water and ceramic pots of the brownish yellow paste that are being made by the elderly within the houses. Ming continues to steep the concoction over a low flame as Tong controls the logistics of working shifts and the distribution of meals.

Two Weeks Later, Village Square

“““Thank the Heavens!”””

A large group of adults along with various children are kowtowing all at once, a soft, audible thud can be heard as their foreheads hit the earth.

“““Thank the Earth!”””

Their foreheads strike the ground once more.

“““Thank the Benefactors!”””

The group is made up of the vast majority of the surviving 136 adult villagers, leading them are the elders who are guiding everyone in the Rites of Thanksgiving to a pair of adults and a small, bright-eyed child. The adults smile sheepishly, with the mother hugging the boy and the father rustling his hair.

“Mother, why are they thanking us?”

The woman with scarlet tinged hair looks at the boy's eyes speechlessly, turning her head to the husband for help.

“Because you helped them, Ming.”

“Oh.” Ming gently gets out of his mother's embrace and bows at the waist, hands on the side, once to the front and once to the side, where the elderly are gathered. “Thank you as well, everyone that listened to me and helped out.”

The older children turn their heads away, trying not to look at him. Likewise, a number of the elderly look away guiltily. The reason they listened was due to the Chief's second son's persuasion and Ming's next door neighbour, Old Grandma Shu; not because they believed what the boy had said. Even so, the result is indisputable, of those treated, only 1 out of 5 died. The ones that survived were merely weakened, some were able to walk on their own on the 3rd day while others took a little more time to recover their strength. Many had continued to look down on Ming previously, thinking it was a futile effort. As they continued to work as ordered, the momentum built, and hope appeared, none of them had the resolve to tell everyone else to stop and just wait for the adults to die. They realized their own hubris and ignorance, which squeezes their hearts, thus not having the face to be able to accept the boy's gratitude.

“Little friend.” A slightly hoarse voice appears from the group of elderly standing

to the side, he slowly makes his way forward until he's in front of the trio.

““Master Monk.”” The parents greet him with a slight bow. Ming looks left and right, then imitates them. The monk closes his eyes and dips his head in acknowledgement, before turning his head downwards to look at the small boy.

“Who taught you the treatment for the Scarlet Hive?”

The boy looks up at the monk, unsure of the content of the question.

“Hm... who taught you how to make everyone better?” The monk, realizing that the child doesn't even know the name of the disease, tries to ask again in a simpler way.

“Oh. Little White, Little Cloud and their mom did.”

“Ming! Stop playing around and answer Master Monk properly!” The father angrily rebukes the child while showing an apologetic face.

“But I am.” Ming pouts his little lip, slightly angry at the accusation.

“Why you...!”

The monk looks at the father, shaking his head and lifting his hand, gesturing for him to calm down. “Can you take me to them?”

“Sure thing, they should be at the field.” The boy starts walking to the field, guiding the monk.

The parents can only look on helplessly, making a complicated face. There's no way for those two to have taught it to Ming, but his seriousness doesn't seem to be a prank, thus they can only follow them curiously. Their son couldn't be possessed by a demon... right?

The gathered villagers disperse as well, as many of them need to go foraging in the forest to bolster the village's dwindled food supply. But some of them overheard the conversation, causing them to become curious, they too, decide to follow them to the field.

*

"Little White, Little Cloud! Come on, come on over! Someone wants to meet you!"

Ming's father's face starts twitching, a torrent of thoughts rushing into his head. He walks up from behind the monk to try and apologize, but the monk is mumbling as two figures approach from the field.

"Master Monk, here they are."

""BAAAAAA!""

kaka

The prayer beads that have never left the monk's hand since his arrival fall onto the field, making a soft scattering sound. The father, seeing the reaction, seems scared and enraged, and grabs the boy by the arm.

"I'm so sorry, Master Monk. He's normally never so mischievous, I will give him a good spanking when we get back, please don't take this to heart. Ming! Apologize right now!"

Ming pouts once more, scrunching his eyebrow, clearly upset. Except that expression is not suited for someone his age and stature, making him look cute instead. "Why are you so stupid, dad?!"

“Just how far are you going to go with this prank of yours?!” The man roughly drags the boy’s arm, making him stand in front of the monk. With his large left hand, he forces Ming’s head to bow down in apology.

“...cognosy.” The monk’s unfocused eyes correct themselves, becoming bright. “Mister, please, he’s likely not playing a prank.” The monk bends down and picks up the prayer beads before looking at Ming in the eyes. “Well done, well done. Can you get them to show me the things used in the treatment?”

“No. But I can. It’s just over there.” The boy yanks his arm away from his father, running into a copse of trees. The monk bows slightly to the father before following with steady steps. The villagers keep their distance, but are stretching their necks to try and piece together the spectacle.

“Darling, don’t tell me... I am actually stupid...?”

“Why don’t we follow them as well, honey?” The woman dodges the question as she follows the monk as well.

““BAAAAAA!”” The two white goats likewise follow the woman, leaving the man standing with the villagers behind him.

At the copse, the trees are of uneven colour, as the wood near the bottom seems to be stripped of their bark.

“They took those dried up cow bitters over there, chew it for a long time and then spit it on the tree. The spring mustard here, do the same. And then they bite the top of some willow saplings and chew on them before eating them as they rub their bodies on the spot they spat the chewed up plants on the tree.” Ming is showing the monk all the plants the goat used, moving left and right, with his fingers excitedly dancing towards the different spots.

“Well done, well done. Little friend, how did you know about zoopharmacognosy?”

The boy stops his excited gestures and tilts his head. “Sofarmanose?”

The monk closes his eyes, patiently rephrasing the question. “How did you know the goats’ medicine would work?”

“Oh, because when they get sick, they go into the trees and eat the herbs that we eat when we get sick.”

The answer may seem incomplete, but the monk understood its implied meaning. “Well done, well done. Little friend, you might have just saved ten thousand people.”

“What is ten thousand people? Is it edible like steamed buns?”

[T/N: Monk said 萬人 (man yun), which means ten thousand people. Ming doesn’t know the word 萬, so he replaced it with a similar sounding word that he knows, which is 曼. 曼頭 (man tou) means Steamed Bun (manjou for the japanese pronouciation). Hence him wondering if it’s food, not that he’s a cannibal]

“Haha”. The monk smiles and laughs, charmed by the boy’s innocence as he shakes his head.

Ming’s parents faces become blank as the monk’s words sink in.

“Heavens... I really am stupid...” The father mumbles with a wry smirk.

“The Chief is back! The Chief is back!” A teenager runs up to the group of villagers gawking at the four of them, slightly out of breath.

The rubberneckers turn their heads towards the teenager. His voice also catches the attention of Ming and company, causing them to look at each other. The group then silently makes their way back to the Village Square, where the usual meeting will take place, a routine that occurs every time the Chief travels outside of the village and returns.

Chapter 3

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Chapter 3 - Cursed Child, Beloved Child 3)

Silence fills the air.

The villagers stare at the magnificently dressed father and son pair.

The chief and his eldest son stare at the numerous surviving villagers.

“Father! Welc... come back...” Tong’s excited voice drops quickly as he looks at the clothing on his father and brother. The Clear Sky Green Forest Village is a relatively poor pioneer village situated outside the White Jade Forest, there’s no way for his father to afford such clothing normally, let alone getting a set for his brother as well.

[T/N: A little hidden wordplay, 清空青森村, notice 清 and 青, the first is pretty much the latter with the water radical added to it, obviously they sound identical.]

“““Welc... ome back, Chief...?””” Ming, his parents, and the other villagers act in similar way to Tong, unsure of the situation.

The monk dips his head towards the silent pair, before finding a spot under a nearby tree. He silently sit in the lotus position, slowly shifting the prayer beads, bead by bead, as he quietly chants a sutra.

“Ahahahahaha! Wow, so many survivors! Your village must be bigger than you claimed, eh Chief Gwai.” A fat, sweaty man laughs loudly, as he makes his way to the Village Square, escorted by a rank of warriors and a pair of courtesans.

“Mister Gwai, please, wait at the Guesthouse.” The Chief gesture at his eldest son. “Go entertain them.”

The youth looks around with unease before nodding his head curtly, putting on a smile as he leads the group away. “Right this way, Mr. Gwai.”

“Ahahaha! Certainly, certainly!”

[T/N: The chief is named 季 meaning season. While the laughing guy is named 貴, meaning expensive. They are both pronounced Gwai.]

The man and his entourage follow the youth, exiting from the Village Square.

“What is the meaning of this, father?!” Tong recognized the fat man the moment he appeared. “Why the hell is the slave merchant here?!”

The gathered crowd murmurs, as some of them quickly caught on, making the connection between their clothing, the timing of their return and the appearance of a slave merchant.

“Chief Gwai! Explain yourself!”

“Yeah!”

“Explain!”

The situation is like a fuse being lit, just waiting for it to reach the powder keg.

“I-It was for the village! We could have revitalized the village and gotten rid of the extra mouths we would’ve needed to feed!” The Chief, seeing the ruse is unraveled, tries to justify himself.

[T/N: For ‘revitalized’ - The kanji used means “rebuild”, but the meaning is “restoring the population and the buildings”, old timey peasant houses breaks down fast, regardless of culture, but this can be seen in old chinese farmhouses, or thatchroof mudhouses in europe. So aside from population, infrastructures had to be rebuilt too due to lack of usage and someone living in them.]

“Did you consult us?! Did you even consult the Elders?!” One of the more hot-blooded men screams while swinging his white-knuckled fist upward, the star-

shaped scars still visible on his exposed arm, looking in the direction of the Elders.

“I... I...” The Chief sweats profusely, unable to speak coherently.

The Elders shake their heads.

“YOU WHAT?!” The man starts walking toward the Chief aggressively, causing him to take a few steps back.

“I AM STILL YOUR CHIEF!” The slightly balding, sweat covered man bellows back.

PLAT

A slap echoes through the air, followed by complete silence.

“You still have the face to say you are the Chief? What were you doing when we were waiting to die, huh? Living it up, waiting to see which one of our kids you can sell off when you come back?!”

“Yeah! Where the hell were you?! If it wasn’t for Ming and the kids, we’d be dead!”

“PEI! Remove him!”

“Yeah, remove him as Chief!”

“Let me at him too, that shameless beast is not fit to be either pig or dog!”

[T/N: Pei is the spitting sound people imitate, it could also be meant as “fart”, meaning the thing they are looking at/talking about is complete bullshit.]

“STOP!” Tang inserts himself between the growing mob and his father, who’s crawling backward on his butt, tears streaming down his eyes. “Please! Give my father a chance to explain!” Turning his head back to his father, a sorrowful look in his eyes. “You can explain... right, father?”

The elders sigh, before one of them makes their way into the crowd. “Let’s just

stop it at that. We will hold a Referendum in two nights time, we still need to go gather food, so let's stop wasting time, we still have lives to protect." The elderly man shakes his head as he walks out of the mob.

The gathered adults snort coldly at the Chief that's still on the floor before going back to work.

"I'm just giving face to Little Tang there, you damn bastard (turtle egg)."

"You are spared for two nights, you scumbag (turtle egg)."

"Why the hell did we elect you as Chief?! Pei!"

"Damn coward (head-shrinking turtle), hiding behind a kid. I'm sorry for you Tang. Sigh."

"If you can't explain yourself, watch someone chop your turtle head and crush your turtle eggs."

[T/N: Welcome to Sumguy's Turtle Soup and Omelette House, today we will be serving a load of insults featuring turtles and eggs! First up 龜蛋 = turtle egg, which means "bastard", been around since confucius' time apparently! 王八蛋, same as the previous, intentional miswriting of turtle, that still means turtle - and actually accepted as meaning turtle now. It means "son of a bitch", but it was original used by people to call someone a literal pimp - a male that runs or manages a brothel, its meaning has changed, but it's still as derogatory. Then we have 縮頭烏龜, which is "head shrinking turtle", meaning a coward. As for the last dialogue line, you have 龜頭 = turtle head, which can mean "coward's head" or "penis". Or in this case, probably both, cause following that is 龜蛋 again, but in this context, it means his testes. That's it for our menu, if you want the soup, wait until we crack some turtle eggs!]

The leaving villagers repeatedly curse at the Chief before leaving to forage or to take care of the still recovering villagers. Ming is hugged protectively by his mother, his father's upperbody heaves up and down, anger brewing silently in his body.

Night Time - Village Guesthouse

"Gwai Daiyea, please help me out."

"Hmph! Gentleman's word, eight sentences are worth a thousand tael of gold. You promised me that there would be slaves that I can pick left and right, that's why I was willing to give you an advance payment! Don't tell me you are going

back on your words now?” The fat man scoffs at the kneeling Chief while sitting on the host’s chair, one leg up on the seat while being massaged by the courtesans.

“Don’t go too far! At most, we will just pay it all back!” The chief’s eldest son bolts up from his servile position, standing straight up.

“Hmph!” The slave merchant scoffs once more, nodding his head to the courtesan massaging his shoulders. The woman gives him a servile nod, retrieving a scroll from a clothed box before tossing it onto the floor, sneering at the father and son pair with disdain.

The youth picks it up off the floor and reads it, his father getting up timidly and looking over his shoulders. The two of them shudder visibly as they finish reading the contract. “This is highway robbery!”

“Let’s bring it to the Magistrate and see if it’s robbery or not. Little kid, I have to praise you, had the epidemic taken its tolls, you two would’ve indeed made a fortune with your little schemes. Too bad that didn’t happen, so better pay up in three days time, otherwise... I won’t be polite, AHAHAHAHAHAHA.”

The father and son can only smile weakly as they retreat, exiting the Guesthouse.

Night Time, one day after - Gwai Manor’s Courtyard

“Father! Father! What are we going to do?!” The Chief’s eldest son shakes his father in a frenzy.

“What to do, what to do. It’s your damn fault, Kwan! If you didn’t suggest we sell off the orphans after the epidemic, this wouldn’t have happened!” The Chief repeatedly stabs his finger at his son’s temple, pushing him and chasing him at the same time.

“Bu-bu-but you agreed that it was a good idea!” Kwan knocks his father’s hand away, placing the blame back on him.

“So you are saying it’s my fault now?!” The angry, balding man flicks his sleeves, before pulling one sleeve back, readying to strike.

“No, no, of course not!”

“Hmph! So did you managed to borrow the monies from your friends?”

“None of them would even talk to me, I even got chased by the Long family’s hounds when I went to knock on their doors.” The youth’s voice trails off as he gets to the latter part of the sentence, dropping his head.

“Pei! This is what you get for befriending pigs and dogs.” The balding man snorts, sneering as his eyes shift left and right, thinking rapidly.

“How about esteemed father?! You certainly wouldn’t have pigs and dogs for friends right?”

PLAT

A loud slap flashes across Kwan’s face, his father making an ugly expression. “Don’t mention those ungrateful bastards in front of me again!” The Chief flicks his sleeves again. “Since you are so good with your little schemes, help me think of a way out of this!”

The youth covers one side of his face, nursing the red palm print, wincing slightly. He opens his eyes wide, shaking his index finger. “That damned Ming is the one that stopped the epidemic according to the villagers that were cursing at us... Then wouldn’t he be worth more than 20, nay, 30 slaves? With his intelligence, he can be trained to be some Noble’s boytoy.”

[T/N: The word used meant prostitute, but in asian culture, especially older times, it isn’t limited to sex. As “skills”/“arts” can be sold as well. The modern version can be seen in the japanese geisha that’s based on late first

millennium dynasties’ brothels where prostitute only/also sold their arts/skills (be it ‘piano’ which was more like a harp, qi/go/baduk, dance, tea making, etc...)]

“Good! Good idea! But... his parents are still around...”

“So what?! We will sell them too!”

“Good! Good! Ahahahaha!”

“Ahahahahaha!”

Inside the shed, a lone boy pulls his knees to his chest, tears running down his face as he bites his lower lips with blood running down his chin. After his father and older brother left the courtyard to get a good night's sleep, he walks out the shed with an expressionless face and determined eyes.

“Sorry mother, but I can’t stay under the same roof as these beasts. From now on, my surname is Li.” Tang resolutely walks out the courtyard, leaving through the manor’s side door, not looking back once.

[T/N: His surname is 季, by removing the stroke at the top, removing the “roof”, it becomes 李, which is Li.]

Chapter 4

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Chapter 4 - Cursed Child, Beloved Child 4)

Chapter 4

Previously on Dao Ming...

The Chief returns with his eldest son, bringing with them a slave merchant. They intended to sell the orphans due to the epidemic, but Ming's action completely destroyed their plan, putting them in a bind. They conspire to sell off Ming and his parents in order to cover their asses, not knowing that Tong was spying on them. As a result, Tong renounced his surname and left the manor.

A mud brick hut inside the village

TAN TAN TAN

TAN TAN TAN

"Who is it?! Shit!" The half-awake man rushes out of bed, ripping his wooden door wide open. "Is there a fire?!" The gloomy, dark sky greets his eyes, causing him to look left and right. "Damn it, don't tell me there are spirits about." The man shivers lightly as he tries to close the door.

[T/N: 邋遢東西 - dirty things, slang for ghostly things, just made it explicit and upfront instead.]

"Sir."

"Wah!" The man starts with a jump, nearly hitting the wooden beam above, before looking down at the child standing in front of the door. "Damn it, Tong!

People scaring people, gets you scared dead people! Don't play around like that!"

[T/N: 人嚇人 嚇死人 - the idiom is quite catchy and rhythmic, hard to preserve it though T.T]

"Sir. You three have to get out of here as soon as possible." Tong speaks in a flat tone, with a slightly deep voice, despite his age, quickly dispelling any thought of playfulness from the man.

"Honey, what's going on? Haaaa-" A feminine voice drifts in from the small bedroom, followed by a yawn.

"Why...? What's the matter?" The man, noticing the irregularity, ignores his wife as he squats down to Tong's height before putting his hands on his small shoulders.

"The Chief and his son are planning to sell your entire family."

KATA

"They, they can't do that, can they?!" The female voice sounds choked as she approaches from overhearing the conversation, knocking over a chair on the way.

"Dear Wife, calm down. Wake Ming up and pack the bare necessities, we will leave during *Jan* hour when the sky is the darkest."

[T/N: 寅時, old chinese way of keep time, it's the equivalent of our 3-5 am]

"Wait! This could be a trap!" The wife's voice becomes slightly hysteric.

The man's grip tightens ever so slightly as he stares at the youth's eye that seems to shine in the darkness. "No, I believe Tong isn't lying. Go! Get ready!"

His wife nods silently, biting her lower lip, before heading back into their bedroom.

“I will go get Master Green Wisteria in the meantime and cause a distraction, leave when you can.” Tong turns around, nearly ripping off the man’s grip.

“But what about you?” The man forcefully turns the youth back to face him.

“Don’t worry about me, I already have plans for myself. Quickly, we don’t have much time.” The youth turns again, taking a stride towards the house the monk’s staying at, leaving a hesitating man behind.

Guesthouse - Temporary residence for Green Wisteria

Creak

“Who goes there?” A slightly coarse voice asks as the door creaks open.

“Sorry to disturb Master Monk, but numerous lives are in your hands!” The youth answers with a grave, resolute voice.

“Oh?” A hint of surprise creeps inside the voice.

Sheik

The monk flicks his right wrist, sending two pieces of stone toward the candle wick, which sparks right on top of it, lighting up the room. “How so?”

Tong turns away and squints his eyes at the sudden brightness, bringing an arm up to protect his sensitive eyes. “The Chief and his son are planning to get rid of Ming and his family. If there’s a Buddha or Bodhisattva, this will not happen.”

“Ho? What would one such as you know about either?” The monk asks flatly,

noticing the youth's choice of words.

[T/N: Not sure if I'm ruining the experience, just ignore this if you already noticed his word choices. Otherwise, I'll explain. Notice Tong never said "My father and brother" or anything with familial ties, talking about them as though they are strangers.]

"That they'd allow an injustice like this to happen!"

"Suffering is life, life leads to death, death leads to life. Suffering is endless, as is life and death."

"I don't care about your great 'Truths', all I know is that Ming stopped the spread of suffering! For the crime of saving others, he and his family has to suffer? Isn't a Bodhisattva an enlightened one?! Isn't Buddha supposed to ease our suffering?!" The youth clenches his teeth, his voice frantic as his previous appeal through the value of lives seemed to have failed.

[T/N: 大道理 - literal Big Reasons/Principles. It's usually used as philosophical truths and arguments. Just clarifying that this 'Truth' and the next 'Truth' isn't the same.]

"Ask the world, what is love, why pledge to one another through life and death?" The monk sighs softly, advancing another prayer bead in his left hand. "Little friend, brotherly love, familial love, romantic love, the world lives and dies because of love, it makes no difference in the end."

[T/N: Whooooosh, goes my brain, the dialogue is impossible to translate 100%. So here I'm again! "問世間,情為何物,直教生死相許" is a common-ish buddhist reference based on a rather famous work from the Jin dynasty, 情 alone means emotions, but the reference is love in this case. Then he went on with "友情, 親情, 愛情, 人情紙咁薄, 人間為情生死 - first 3 is "friendship, family, love" while the last two part is "human relations are paper-thin (this is a chinese idiom), the human world cause life and death because of love/relationships (also common-ish). It's really smooth in cantonese and really rhythmic, so I'm trying to make it all x love, y love, z love, but it doesn't work all the way as you will see in the following dialogue m(_ _)m]

"I don't care for love, I just care about the reality!" The youth looks at the sky anxiously, he can feel that the time limit is soon approaching. "If you don't want to help, fine!" Without turning back, the boy runs off toward the Chief's manor.

“Praise be, Praise be... Rather it’s Truth, Reality, your True Nature, I shall bear witness to it all...” The monk gets off from the meditation cushion, prayer beads in hand, walking towards the door after Tong has left the building for a while.

[T/N: He said “真情, 真情, 真情, 是真是情, 我會雙目見證...” 真情 means Truth, Reality, True Nature/True Feeling, 是真是情 means “is real, is feeling” used as comparison. As you can see... I’ve no way to repeat “真情” in any english words nor is there an equivalent... The ‘Reality’ used by Tong was 真情 - meaning the reality of the situation, the true event, etc...]

Gwai Manor

“Fire! Fire!”

“Ahh! Someone! Someone help!”

“Master! Hurry, come out, there’s a fire!”

A few servants are screaming as they run outside the residence, helplessly flailing their arms.

“Come back here!”

A roar can be heard all of the sudden.

“Someone! Stop that man!”

A tattered and bloodied Tong appears from a nearby alley, causing the servants to gasp.

“Young Master Tong! Quick, Yu, go find the doctor!”

“But... the fire.”

“Go! I will handle this.”

The girl servant runs off into the village, screaming for ‘Doctor Ye’ all the while.

“Fire! Fire! Wake up and help fight the fire!” The previous, old looking servant, runs around the dirt road and yells. The other servants follow his lead and do the same, running in different directions.

Not long after, villagers can be seen charging out of their mudbrick houses to survey the scene. Without so much as a word, they form a line next to the nearest well as they immediately relay buckets upon buckets of water to the scene of the fire. Despite their efforts, the blaze refuses to die down, as such, they start to douse the surrounding area with water to prevent the fire from spreading.

“Ah... My... my house...” The village Chief collapses to his knees as he watches the roof of the manor crumble.

“Father, father!” His eldest son drags him by the arm to get him standing again. “You! You! You! Why didn’t you work faster?!” He stabs his finger towards the villagers that were the first on the scene accusingly. “And you!” *SLAP* “Useless piece of trash, why didn’t you protect the valuables?!”

The slapped chief steward covers his swelling face in shock, he was the first one to run back into the manor to drag out the then still sleeping Chief; something that the rest of the servants saw as well. In the midst of the commotion, the sorry looking Tong suddenly runs up and grabs him by the arm, twisting it. He stealthily smears a small clump of crushed charcoal on the arm inside the sleeve during the process.

“It... it was you!” Tong tears away the older youth’s sleeve, revealing the blackened arm underneath. “Why?! Why did you set the house on fire?!”

The Chief turns his glazed eyes away from the frame of the still burning manor

toward his sons, drifting toward the blackened arm that's still struggling in Tong's grip before turning his gaze towards the eldest one that's still supporting him with his arm. With a shake, he immediately distances himself in fright while pointing at him with a shivering hand.

"Wait...! Don't listen to him! It wasn't me!" The older youth roughly grabs Tong with his now freed arm and shoves him away. "It wasn't me!"

The villagers had stopped drawing water from the well a while ago, many of which have turned their heads to watch the commotion. They murmur amongst themselves as they shake their heads in disgust and give the eldest son a look of disdain. Hidden away in the shadows, a man with muslin covering his face can be seen sighing.

"Praise be, praise be..."

Chapter 5

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Chapter 5 - Cursed Child, Beloved Child 5)

Previously on Dao Ming...

Tong ran to Ming’s house to warn them of his father’s plan to sell them to the slave dealer, then ran off to the guesthouse housing Monk Wisteria to get his help. After failing to make the monk budge, he went to set fire to his father’s manor. After the villagers try to save the house by putting out the fire, his older brother criticizes everyone. In the midst of that, Tong stealthily smears charcoal onto his arm, framing him as the one who sets the fire.

“Wait! Wait! It has to be him! It was Tong that did it!” The eldest son of the Chief repeatedly stabs his finger in Tong’s direction, his face twisted into an ugly expression.

The Chief and villagers bring their attention to Tong with doubtful looks, not entirely convinced.

“‘If man doesn’t benefit oneself, the world will come to an end.’, for what reason do I have for setting my own home on fire, Gwai Lam Zyu?! Isn’t that why you tried to kill me when I caught you?!” Tong points right back at his brother, with blood dripping from his arm, an ornate self-defense dagger can be seen embedded into his malnourished arm.

[T/N: ‘人不為己，天誅地滅’ transliteral -> Man does not care for self, heaven shatters ground crumbles, idiom means that a person will always put himself first, such is the natural way of the world - hence the world ending if the person doesn’t. 季林珠 - Gwai Lam Zyu, surname meaning Season, lam for forest and zyu for pearl. Saying someone’s full name in Chinese in this way represents a lack of respect with a touch of rebuke, or just a very serious mode like your mother saying your full name :P.]

The eldest son's finger trembles as the dagger looks eerily familiar, quickly patting down his robe in a frenzy, as though he's looking for something. His mouth starts gaping like a fish out of water as he realizes that his dagger is missing. "Brother! I would never stab you! Someone is trying to frame me here!" His face trembles as he notices an old man being escorted through the crowd. "What reason do I have for setting the house on fire?! Like you, why would I burn down my own home?!"

Tong sneers, "Frame you?! You mean like how you tried to frame Chief Steward Lou by saying he didn't protect the valuables? Like how you tried to frame the villagers by saying they didn't stop the fire?" The servants' and the villagers' gaze turn back onto Lam Zyu as he continues. "Who doesn't know you fucked up with that snakehead Gwai? You are probably trying to find any excuse to sell someone to that son of a bitch at this point to save your own skin!"

[T/N: Snakehead is similar to triad boss or a loanshark, it can be used positively to address a powerful merchant or something similar, but in this case, it's obviously done with a negative connotation.]

"You! You!" Chief Steward Lou points at Zyu while clutching his chest. "Good! Good! To think I treated you like my own grandson! Pei! We are through, I will have no relations to this family of yours!" The wrinkled old man turns to the dark sky and laments. "Oh, Old master Gwai! You must be turning in your grave, your son is useless, and your family's heir is beyond redemption."

"Elder Lou...!" Chief Gwai reaches out his hand helplessly at the sudden outburst.

"Same here!"

"And here!"

"Pei! To think I 'wasted my life for you'!"

The senior staff of the manor quit one after another, the other servants' faces pale, as they too would leave if they could, it's obvious that the House, like its master, is no good.

[T/N: 幫你賣命 - transliteral 'help you sell life', meaning someone who does their best for you, *ie.* Working to their fingers, working tirelessly, etc... 'wasted my life for you' is the middle ground I chose for its context since being indentured as a servant is often a pretty heavily entwined master-servant relationship as it's different from being bought as a slave to become a servant. The 'House' used here means the clan/family, used the same way as one with noble Houses, *ie.* House of Medici]

"Sister Ceoi, Brother Zoeng, Elder Ma, please, please, think it through, it's just little kids spewing off nonsense. Just give me some face, after working all these years, think of your salaries!" Chief Gwai tries to pacify the servants, knowing that without them, his House would truly fall. The Chief Steward looks after the day to day domestic expenses and tasks, the Head of the Kitchen is responsible for meals and wellbeing, the Head of Bookkeeping is responsible for the day to day operation of his family business as well as the taxation of the territory to be sent as tribute to the Governor as Village Chief, and the Vice-Chief is responsible for making contacts and setting up contracts. Without them, he will become a toothless tiger even if he wasn't already in a bind. "Little Zyu, apologize to Elder Lou right away!"

"Hmmp! Too little too late!" The former Chief-Steward snorts coldly, before turning to the old man making his way through the crowd. "Doctor Ye! Quick, help Little Tong."

"Calm down, calm down." The old man drops the wooden medicine trunk on his back onto the ground, ties a length of cloth around his forehead, knotting his disheveled hair out of the way and reaches out for the nearby Tong.

"Is it serious, doctor?" The girl servant asks with a serious face, along with the rest of the lower caste servants, Tong has stopped treating them as objects years ago. This bred a sense of loyalty and familial feeling between them in regards to this Young Master of the House.

"Hmm..." The doctor removes some ceramic bottles, a torch and various objects from the trunk. *SHIIII* The old man skillfully tears apart Tong's clothing before opening a small bottle and rubbing his hands with its contents. "Alright, someone hold up the torch, I will inspect him now."

“Little Zyu, why aren’t you moving?” The Chief becomes helpless, as all the indentured staff leaves, with only the slave-servants still remaining. “What... what are we going to do now?”

His eldest son just stands there like a piece of wood, unable to accept the series of event. The plague was supposed to be their road to fortune... ‘How did it all turn out like this? What have I done wrong?’ keeps circling in the recesses of his mind.

Dong, Dong, Dong

“Attention, the Elders are here to speak.” A middle-aged man bangs a gong three times to get everyone’s attention.

“This is as good a time as any, so we will make this quick. As everyone can see, Gwai Zyu Nou isn’t fit to be the Village Chief, nor does he have the qualifications to do so. Representing the Elders, I invoke the removal of the current Village Chief and start a new selection for the next Chief! Anyone that objects on the Chief’s behalf, speak now!”

The gossiping villagers became quiet after the gong rang, now the current topic has them speaking softly again, under the bright, warm glow of the burning manor.

Seeing the unfavourable condition, Chief Gwai starts calling names. “Old Seon, I helped you expand your field by 5 mu! Is this how you repay me?”

“I didn’t even bring it up with you, taking 50% from the rest of my fields even though you’d long ago recouped the cost! And then you planned to sell my kids and wife? Screw, you, you bastard.” The scrawny man, scarred by hives all over his body, looks away while holding his pinky out, pointing away.

[T/N: The TL;DR of this pinky gesture means disapproval.]

The Chief flinches slightly, changing his target. “Sister-” But before he can get more than a word out, the villagers, one by one, looks away and repeat the same gesture as the first man, with a few holding a fist under their chin.

[T/N: This gesture is basically ‘fuck you’ in southern chinese sign language.]

DONG

A loud, single strike rings out from the gong. “The villagers have spoken, Gwai Zyu Nou, you are hereby relieved of your responsibility and authority as the Village Chief.”

“Wait, Elders, wait, can’t we talk this out?!”

“We did, we just finished, didn’t you hear? Lou is right, your ancestors must be ashamed of you.” The elder walks away from the former Chief, passing by Tong, shaking his head as he sighs. “Competence skipped a generation, and the one with the talent isn’t even the heir.”

“Ah Zyu, Ah Zyu, what are we going to do now?!” The former Chief shakes his unresponsive eldest son, who is looking back at him with unfocused eyes.

“You can sell yourselves, one will make a good fool, the other is bright and educated, so he will make an excellent boytoy, maybe even a eunuch.” Tong sends the words back at the father and son pair, causing them to shiver. Those are the words they spoke before! That must mean...

“You ungrateful son, how can you betray your own family for mere outsiders?!”

[T/N: 反骨仔 - transliteral “reverse bone son” meaning someone ungrateful, a traitor. 手指咬出唔咬入 - transliteral “fingers bite out not bite in” meaning willing to help outsiders but don’t bother helping those close to them. Seeing as we don’t have an english equivalent, I opted for a more contextual translation.]

[E/N: or better yet “BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER U TRAITOR”]

“You... you... you...” Lam Zyu snaps out of his stupor into a rage, flinging himself at the bandaged Tong.

CRUNCH, SNAP

A blur of white flashes by suddenly, colliding with the eldest son just before he reaches Tong. “He’s my patient, don’t you DARE lay a hand on him.” The old doctor walks back from the stilled young man, who shortly collapses onto the ground with a spasm. With a smooth motion, he cradles the young man’s head before it falls onto the floor, grips his arm and pinches his throat slightly before slapping him in the chest.

In the shadows, forgotten by everyone, is the monk, who sighs once more and leaves quietly, unbeknownst to anyone.

CRACKLE

The spasming young man breathes in with a gasp.

“5 taels of gold, payment for treating Tong, medical compensation for your eldest son assaulting my patient, payment for emergency life saving treatment.”

“That... that’s highway robbery! You can’t do that!” The former Chief exclaims while reaching for his eldest son.

“Bring it to the Magistrate then! Let’s see who’s in the right!”

The former Chief flinches, without his position for status, he’d be treated like a commoner! And it isn’t like he has the money to bribe anyone! He can only stare hatefully at the old doctor, as though he can stare him to death.

“If you can’t make the payment, I will be taking Tong as collateral.” The doctor isn’t blind, with his many years of experience under his belt as a former army doctor, he can tell that the dagger wound was self-inflicted and amateurishly

done, with the blade just shy of an artery. For a child to go that far, there must be some unspeakable occurrence.

“Oh ho?! What’s this, Chief Gwai, what happened to your house?” A fat man strolls up from the road with a yawn, escorted by a group of men.

““Gwai Daiyea...”” Both the Chief and his eldest son murmurs weakly as the devil of their nightmare walks up to them, the glowing flame framing the man as though he came from the brimstone and Sulphur (Yellow) Springs of the Netherworld.

[T/N: Have a hard time with this one, author chose to use 磺 as opposed to 黄, the first meaning sulphur, and the latter being yellow. Brimstone is written as 硫磺. 磺 is literally “rock” and “yellow” put together... cause yeah, sulphur is a yellow mineral. So this could be a typo, could be a pun, or something I don’t know, hence I have the yellow in bracket :P]

White Jade Forest, near the village

“Are we all set?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Yes, father.”

“Alright, we are going to follow an animal trail, I met a foreign huntsman here before that said he came from the ‘Other side’.”

“... Dear... isn’t that...”

“Haha, nono, he’s human, it’s just they don’t have a name for that place.”

“Sigh... to think we have to abandon our home...”

““Heavens don’t give humans hopeless paths’, it will be tough for a while, but it will beat becoming slaves and being separated.”

[T/N: 天無絕人之路 - transliteral “heaven don’t have deadends for human”. It’s similar to the idiom for “when god closes a door, he opens a window”, except the problem is that there’s no “God” here so to speak.]

The three of them grit their teeth as they enter the dark, foreboding forest where monsters and heavens-knows-what lurks.

Interlude 1

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Interlude 1)

Previously on Dao Ming...

Tong frames his own brother for arson by sacrificing his own body, the villagers decides to disempower the Chief. Ming has escaped with his mom and dad.

3 Days after Li Fang Sing's reincarnation in the Netherworld - Dominion Court

BANG BANG BANG

An elegantly dressed man, sitting in the center of a semi-circle, flanked by dignified individuals of various shapes and sizes, strikes the commandment tablet on the table in front of him before bellowing out. "Bring forth the accused!"

"Yes, Milord!" The head guard, acting as the court bailiff, answers before directing his subordinates, "Bring forth Zhu Wuneng, King Yanlou, Lin Bai!"

The side door to the court opens with a creak, followed by a column of guards who form a path toward to the dais situated before the gathered dignitaries. Encircling the representatives and the accused are benches filled with different creatures, with the benches sloping up like an endless, circular lecture hall, each layer rising the further away from the center they are.

"Hohoho, hello hello, this old altar cleaner, the 'Earthly Tumbleweed' greets the various masters of the realms."

[T/N: This is another play on word with his titles, his original title being 天蓬元帥 and his current title 淨壇使者 - aka Cleanser of the Altar - and him jokingly refer to himself as 地蹣荒帥 - Earthly Tumbleweed - in the prologue. I forgot the T/N it with the explanation, oops. 天蓬元帥 - Marshal of the Heavenly Tumbleweed, 地蹣荒帥 - flip 天 into 地 (heaven is above, the earth is below kinda connotation) then keeps the pronunciation of 蓬元, and finally keeping 帥, it turns into "The Lilac Daphne (a plant that's grow on graves apparently) Commander who bumps the ground" - since the reference is

so convoluted, I just went fuck it and went with 'Earthly Tumbleweed' to keep the first part and reflect his humbler, self-depreciative title that he seems to enjoy. I can't guarantee this is the right reading of it though :P]

“GREETINGS, YOUR MAJESTIES OF THE KNOWN DOMAINS.”

“This humble servant greets the various Rulers.”

A pigheaded man, a stern-looking man in antiquated garb and a plainly dressed scholar present themselves.

The man places the commandment tablet down on the table before opening up the scrolls on top of his desk, reading it out loud. “The three of you are hereby accused of breaking the Cosmic Laws, by interfering with a Soul’s reincarnation. Do you have any words to defend yourselves?”

[T/N: 聯合界法 - Cosmic Laws, it actually translates into 'United World Laws', but 界 is used to represent a universe, and 'Laws of the United Universes' sounds dumb as fuck and a mouthful, thus 'Cosmic Laws'. Similar for 聯合界會委員 - 'Cosmic Assembly Members' as opposed to 'United Universe's Committee, Committee Members'.]

“Ruler of the Immortal Scholar Domain (仙書界), may I ask, what is the exact law we broke and how did we break it?” The judge-secretary of King Yanlou asks with a bow.

“You and your superior work as the Magistrates who oversee Samsara, how do you not know?” The man asks back with narrowed-eyes and a stern voice.

“Please, humour me.” The judge-secretary bows one more, not a hint of insincerity in his voice.

The man makes a difficult face as his eyes dart back and forth. “Cosmic Law 146: Each soul is to be guided upon their arrival to the Netherworld, judged according to their karma done in life so that their Soul may be enriched to advance further in their Dao. No one may impede or arbitrarily deprive a Soul of advancement, violators will have their Soul fragmented and restart anew.”

“Thank you, your Lordship.”

“Hohoho, may I ask, how did we ‘impede or deprive’ a Soul? You may want to look at the Soul in question.” The pigheaded man asks in a jovial fashion.

The man places the scroll on his table, swiping it, as do the other Cosmic Assembly Members, looking up the Soul in question.

“The Soul’s past life is - Li Fang Sing. He disposed of the rightful king of the country who had the Mandate of Heaven, committing various atrocities without remorse. According to the Law of that Domain, he was to be guided to the 16th layer of Hell to experience equivalent suffering to understand the suffering he has wrought before his next Reincarnation.”

The Jade Emperor of the Green Jade Domain nods sagely, agreeing with the speaker’s representation of his Domain’s Law.

“Really now, please, look at his Karma pages.” The pigheaded-man randomly grabs a pear out of his robe, polishing it off on his robe before taking a bite with an ensuing *crunch*.

The guards and audience try to suppress their laughter at the man’s nonchalant behaviour.

Poof... Poof. Poof. Poof. Poof.

The scroll on each of the Cosmic Assembly Member’s desks releases a cloud of smoke, surprising them. The audience’s quiet laughter immediately changes into murmuring between themselves, wondering what’s going on.

I think this might be a reference to the counterfeit apple stuff as well. Actually, gonna add that in too.

“YOUR MAJESTIES, MIGHT I SUGGEST USING THE P-SILK MODEL? IT SEEMS YOUR CRAPPY SCROLLS DON’T HAVE THE CAPACITY TO HANDLE IT.”

[T/N: Okay, I admit, I chuckled at this random dig at Apple. 皮絲 = something like skin-silk, sounding like PC, 砰渦 = something like a 'bumping swirl'. 砰渦 = sound the same as 蘋果 which is pretty obvious what it's referring to. So you had my rather poor attempt at keeping the pun above. Not sure if it's also referencing the rather recent Apple counterfeit stuff. E/N: Hackintosh]

The Immortal Scholar representative motions to the bailiff, who immediately nods and starts fading away. Soon after, a line of servants appear from a side door opposite to where the accused came from, and place a plain looking gray scroll onto each Assembly Members' desk before taking away the gold-silk scrolls that are still giving off small amounts of smoke.

"Nineteen minus Eighty-two?!" A mermaid with a pendant hanging over her forehead exclaims.

"What's the matter, Grand Oracle of the Azure Dream?" The bearlike humanoid next to her asks.

The mermaid merely turns her head and then points at her scroll, which prompts the rather leisurely creature to open their own scroll.

"He sacrificed 82 years of his expected lifespan?! What did he do?!" The bearlike creature dangles its mouth in shock.

The air above the Rulers and the accused shimmers like a mirage, before it displays the contents like a projection, reflecting what's being seen by one of the Assembly Members.

Gasp

"This... Soul was to be sent to Hell?"

"How... how can one Soul produce such a large effect? How many pages are there for those that plea for him?!"

"Which Dao does he belong to?! Which Dao is it?!"

The audience have now forgone the usual courtesy given to the Cosmic Court and is in the midst of an uproar. Likewise, the Assembly Members are staring at their respective scrolls with various expressions, ranging from amazement to numbness. The face of the Jade Emperor -ruler of the Green Jade domain-visibly darkens, flushed with a feeling of shame and anger that he hasn't experienced in countless years. After quickly swiping the scroll at a speed faster than the eye can perceive for minutes, he suddenly stops.

"Great Verdant Vines, release thy hold, windows of the Heavens, be my eyes to behold." The dark-faced Ruler recites a chant while holding a green amulet that seems to be both wood and mineral.

A green full length mirror appears in front of the man, the rippling green light drawing the attention of everyone in attendance. The audience hush as they crane their necks to see what's going on. The three accused standing on the dais smile, including the normally stern, steel-faced King Yanlou, in understanding.

Inside the Green-tinged Mirror

"Ma! I don't need to go to school! Let me just plow the field!" A bare-chested teenager complains while shouldering a hoe, standing in the doorway of a mud house.

"Shut up you dumb kid! When you can learn, learn! Why back in my grandpa's day, none of the commoners could learn even if they had the money!" The middle-aged woman turns to the small statuette with a scholarly pose and white hair. "Oh, Great Official Li, please forgive my ignorant son. Damn idiot takes for granted that he can eat his fill and never have to worry about common diseases." The woman puts her hands together before bowing to the statuette.

The Ruler flicks his sleeve and the view inside suddenly changes.

“We need the money NOW for the project.” A scholar with a topknot passionately argues before a gathering of officials.

“No, it can damn well wait!!! That public work will only create a temporary solution! It would deprive the area of resources in the future though! You want the region to go through a recession?!” A woman interrupts, pointing at the first man accusingly.

“Look, something still needs to be done immediately, but let’s look at the immediate aftermath of the project’s completion. We should scale down the project and use the saved revenue to connect the road between Tai Ching and Puo Ming.”

The man and the woman grab the third man by the collar. ““Stop it with the half-assed commitment! We have to look at the short/long term!”” Both of them give the man a quick punch. The other officials, seeing that, also start yelling and punching each other.

Gong

All the officials immediately stop what they are doing after the gong rings and immediately start straightening their clothes and hats.

“Whew, you guys want to grab a bite together?” The punched man, who also got his shots back in, asks the two that he was just arguing with not too long ago.

“Yeah, I heard this new place called the Red Maple Pavilion has some great wine, I could certainly use a drink, this project is just crazy.”

“Tell me about it, there’s no way to get resources to that area and develop it without the initial capital...” The first man sighs as he complains, before he narrows his eyes lewdly. “But I know you aren’t going to the Red Maple for the drink, but for that handsome waiter I keep hearing about, am I right or am I right?” The first man pokes fun at the woman, who blushes slightly and pouts.

“Hahaha, let’s go, let’s go! Otherwise those guys will take all the seats.” The man who asked the two subtly nods his head in the direction of the other officials, who seem to be having a similar sort of conversation.

The Jade Emperor flicks his sleeves again... and again... and again...

Each subsequent scene makes his face seemingly older, causing him to finally sigh and stop his spell. There’s nothing fantastic about the scenes save for the weird way the government is run, an unheard of Constitutional Triarchy, where a career bureaucrat will be appointed ruler for a limited term, with three independent government bodies that respectively look at the short, middle, and long-term before debating and fighting for fundings. But, that very ‘blandness’ of the scenes is what caused the Jade Emperor to become crestfallen. There’s no famine, no widespread conflict, a relatively large and stable, if lackluster, country that’s neither suffering nor is it too prosperous. Even the inevitable carnage caused by diseases that run rampant; their suffering is minimized through the immediate response of the government.

The country will fall eventually, as all others do, but that kind of rugged, natural peace will no doubt endure for a long time and be referenced for eons to come on that planet. For a man that was guided to be born as a commoner, for a Soul that young, for someone deemed to go to Hell, his very existence was what made that relatively vast country on that planet a better place. Compared to the so-called King with the Mandate of Heaven, it’s like comparing night and day.

Regret! The deepest of regrets! The Jade Emperor’s chest feels tight, as though an invisible hand is squeezing him. Had he spotted this talent, the management of his Domain would be so much easier! The shame and anger, that he, the Jade Emperor that sought Enlightenment would think that his Laws and management would be just and fair.

“OLD GREEN, DON’T MAKE THAT FACE. IT’S IMPOSSIBLE TO MANAGE EVERY SOUL IN A DOMAIN, EVEN US GODS MAKE MISTAKES.” King Yanlou pauses

meaningfully. “AND PLUS, HE WOULDN’T HAVE ACCEPTED THE POSITION ANYWAYS.” The Magistrate consoles the dark-faced man.

“Hahaha, damn right!” The pigheaded man laughs cheerily, pointing at himself while eating a peach, causing the monkey with the golden armour sitting in the audience to roll his eyes.

“I vote that the charges be dropped and the three of them be rewarded at my expense.” The Green Jade’s Jade Emperor announces solemnly.

“I concur.” The bearlike creature agrees immediately. He’s a Ruler that values valor. The Soul in question might not have fought in a battlefield, but the steadfast courage and determination it displayed for the sake of others was obvious to see. To even completely overturn the calculated predictions of the Fate algorithm! These qualities, together they have engendered in it a deep admiration for this young, young Soul.

“And I”

“I.”

“I.”

...

...

Each of the Assembly members agrees to the motion, save for the Immortal Scholar and the Grand Oracle that have continued to scour the information within the scroll.

“Ahem.” The Jade Emperor coughs politely, signaling the two.

“Oh, um... sorry, what were we discussing?” The Immortal Scholar asks, his

sword-like brows relaxing themselves as he looks up from the scroll.

“The Assembly votes to drop the charges and Green Jade offers to reward them instead.”

“Oh, yes, yes, let’s do that.” The man quickly nods, then pausing. “King Yanlou, if you don’t mind, can you send the Life Data of this Soul to me... eh... I mean us?”

The stern-faced Magistrate nods, as he expected as much.

“Um... it says here that the Soul has reincarnated into a new Domain called the Domain of the Endless Seekers, but I don’t recall meeting such a Ruler.” The Grand Oracle asks, her eyes seemingly glow while being clouded with a white haze, her Divination spell being blocked.

“That would be because the Ruler is the Domain itself.” Zhu Wuneng replies matter-of-factly.

Silence, absolute silence. It takes an unknown amount of time before someone accidentally coughs, breaking the oppressive silence of the Assembly.

“Which... which Soul was it that managed to succeed in the Dao of Creation?”

“Does it matter? It sacrificed everything to run an experiment. It created a Domain without Heaven, the Fate prediction algorithm will be useless, each Soul will truly be free of our influence.”

“Why...?” The Immortal Scholar asks.

“No offense to you, Jade Emperor. But Li Fang Sing is merely a recent example of those which slip through the gaps. How do we know we are guiding them properly? It’s not like any of us completely understand the entirety of a Dao, let alone the Grand Dao. And the Fate prediction algorithm, can we say for certain that’s it’s reliable in regards to the outcome of the Soul?” The pigheaded man

suddenly tilts his head and turns toward the mermaid. “Ah, it seems the Grand Oracle has also come to a similar conclusion.”

The tens of thousands of eyes focus on the woman floating inside of the semi-circle where the Rulers are gathered, as though asking her for verification of Zhu Wuneng’s words.

“My Dao of Divination is somewhat close to the Dao of Fate, I can verify that at the very least, there are obvious flaws in the Fate algorithm... I suggest we immediately find a replacement while we take the program down.”

“But... then we would be ruling blind.” One of the Rulers chirps in.

“That’s the point, we leave it up to Fate, whatever it is.” The pigheaded-man points at the Ruler with a smile while tossing a peach towards the Mermaid.

“The Ruler of the Domain of Endless Seekers has left ways for us to peek in on the Domain through connections to the Netherworld, use that as a medium and see if we can detect what Li Fang Sing’s reincarnation is like.”

The Grand Oracle nods slightly, closing her eyes as she holds the peach up with her left hand. Currents of energy swirl chaotically before coalescing together into a stream, flowing from her into the peach, and the peach into a ring shaped mirror, a Scryer’s Pool. Inside the mirror, a Faerie Ring inside a forest filled with white trees flares up into a white glow, before numerous sprites appear, dancing around. After a while, the disembodied, child-like voices chant together.

Garden of Origin, a small utopia,

Fate determines all births, deaths, and the chance meetings of the young and old.

A farflung villa, where a family will lay down their roots anew,
a task that’s too long for a life too short, alas it is also fate.

Connected fates are shattered, a family breaks apart,

Father, sons and brothers all drifts apart.

Corrupted officials, two-bit players,
Willing to sell false accusations for gold and silver.

Garden of Origin, a small utopia,
Fate determines all births, deaths, and the chance meetings of the young and old.

源圓園,小樂園,
幼老生死一切緣。

遠縣苑,建家源,
路長命短還是緣。

圓緣完,破家圓,
父子兄弟就玩完。

軟院員,小演員,
為金為銀賣心冤。

源圓園,小樂園,
幼老生死一切緣。

[T/N: I've kept the original poem in place since it's weird to say the least, but it does have a certain rhythm to it. I recommend you put that into google speech and have it read it out to you, but if you are too lazy, just realize that in each of those 5 (okay, 4, one is a repeat) lines, the first 3, the 6th and the last character of each line sounds the same in Cantonese/Yue pronunciation (small deviation in Mandarin)]

A/N: My poetry writing skill is very weak, please bear with me.

T/N: Fuck you, I've read more religious texts in the last few days than in the last

few years combined and got into rather pointless arguments cause of you.. And getting lectures on buddhism by some elders T.T Still, you made me laugh, (PCMASTERRACE!) so I forgive you >.> I'm also having a hard time reconciling the fact that people are more familiar with the mandarin pronunciation of these classical characters (hell, even I don't recognize them with the jyutping), while I try to keep the pronunciation of non-god characters in Cantonese... I really don't know what to do at this moment, it's a headache to decide.

Chapter 6

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Chapter 6 - Disciple of Parvati, Disciple of Bhaisajyaguru 1)

Previously on Dao Ming...

King Yanlou, Judge of Hell, his secretary Lin Bai and Zhu Wuneng, aka Pigsy/Pig Demon aka brother disciple of Son Goku got put to trial for releasing Li Fang Sing into a new Domain without authorization. The Rulers of the various Domain threw the charges out after finding out the truth, learning that there is a flaw in their Fate prediction system. Incidentally, they also find out that someone succeeded in the Dao of Creation, creating the Domain that Li Fang Sing's soul currently resides in.

The sun is now dropping from its zenith as the willow tree's curtain of foliage softly sweeps above the river, rustling softly in the gentle breeze. The resting youth slowly opens his eyes as the the warmth of the sun perfuses throughout his body as the willow's shade shifts away from him.

With natural movements, he gets up and pats his robe, shaking out the leaves and soil, before stretching with large, deliberate motions. Satisfied, he walks to the gourd embedded into the ground nearby, with a slender branch stabbing into its opening. He removes the branch carefully, the tip of which is broken, with a milky liquid over its breakage. He then peers into the gourd before giving a little swirl, nodding as he feels the satisfying weight shifting within. He swiftly corks the gourd and retrieves the small bundle of willow bark he had gathered in the morning and heads back to the village.

[T/N: This almost whooshed over my head, good thing I did some reading prior + help made everything clicked. Guanyin, aka the Goddess of Mercy, has willow as part of her symbolism, in fact, she holds it in one hand while she hands a jar of water in the other. Considering that the fucker is definitely referring to buddhist/hindu references here, I think this scene is intentional. This seems to be continuing from the very beginning of Chapter 1 btw]

The youth follows the river until it was Wei hour (1pm) with his harvest in tow, where he sees a tributary feeding into the main river. He walks closer to the water's edge, approaching a bunch of stakes submerged near the mouth of the tributary before walking back to the animal trail. Silently, he walks once more, up the path fenced in by the verdant growths. The sound of the river changes from murmuring splashes gradually to a persistent roar, the rippling turquoise crystal surface changing into churning white waves. The trail twists and inclines sharply as he finally spots the raging waterfall that marks the last leg of his journey. The drizzling mists cool his slightly sweaty body as he walks under the rainbow in the air, not too far ahead, a small pillar of smoke drifts up into the clear sky.

“Hey, Ming!” A sun-tanned, muscular man with scars all over his bare chest greets the youth while submerged waist deep in a nearby pool of water. “You ate yet?!”

“Greetings, Senior Fu, how was your hunting trip?”

[T/N: He said big brother Tiger... but it sounds really stupid in english, so yeah, going with senior instead. And eh...
“You ate yet?” is used a greeting of sorts as well, just FYI.]

The man smiles with his teeth showing points at a shack that's emitting clouds of white smoke. “Very good, a little too good maybe, actually... Wait right there!” He quickly climbs out of the water, puts on his pants and grabs a stick with a blackened end before heading toward a pile of ash. With practiced movement, he stabs the stick in with a *cack* before lifting something dark green out of the ash. He lowers the bundle on the stick carefully down to the ground before walking behind the makeshift shack, making a small ruckus before reappearing again with something slightly charred in each hand.

“These are about done, bring these to your parents and that boss of yours.”

“Um...” Ming becomes a little hesitant at the offer.

Hoist always implies verticality so if it's not mentioned it's supes confusing to a normal english reader

“Eh?” The man stills for a moment before clapping his hands. “Ah! Don’t worry, don’t worry, I didn’t intentionally make it for that damn monk. Whoever passed by would’ve gotten it, there’s just simply too much meat since that damned boar appeared from nowhere and attacked me. Actually, when you get back, can you send someone to help me haul these back tomorrow?”

[T/N: Apparently, some sects of buddhism allows their practitioners to eat meat as long as it wasn’t intentionally killed for them to consume, so the monk literally lucked out.]

“Oh, of course. Then I won’t be polite.”

“That’s more like it! Oh, right, here, eat this while it’s fresh. I would eat it myself if I hadn’t had so much already.” The man hands one of the charred, fan-like object to Ming before heading off to grab some leaves. “Boar liver, fresh from the fire! Nibble on that while I wrap the legs up.”

Ming lowers his baggage to the side of the path before sitting himself down on one of the boulders beside the waterfall, stabbing the meat-fan into the ground before washing his hands in the water. After swinging his hands dry, he picks up the fan and starts sliding out the slabs of meat that are weaved between the various strips of the fan-like contraption. After licking his lips to moisten them, he proceeds to make short work of the unexpected treat.

...

The youth licks his fingers clean before washing them in the water again.

“How was it?” The man asks eagerly while bringing the leaf-wrapped bundle and Ming’s baggage over.

“Very delicious.”

“Hahahaha! Good! Alright, careful on the way back, and tell Master I said hi!”

“I’ll let dad know.” Ming picks up his baggage, shouldering it on his back, then

slings the leaf bundle over his neck and carries it in the front. The youth gives a quick smile before heading into the mountain to where the village is once more.

The man sighs happily as he watches the youth disappear beyond the curve of the path. “Damn rascal, barely six years and he has grown so much already.” A smile creeps onto his face before heading back to the shack, to make sure the meat gets preserved properly.

Southstop City, Province of Extreme Harmony (太和 - Tai Wo, I can switch to transliteration if Extreme Harmony sounds too stupid >.>) - A Commoner's rowhouse

“Physician Li(理), please, save my daughter!” A pair of husband and wife are kneeling on the floor, repeatedly banging their foreheads onto the rough, wooden floor.

“Then pay up!” The plainly dressed man with a scholarly appearance shakes his right hand that's holding onto a measly 5 bronze coins.

“We don't have that much money right now, I will be your ox and horse, please, I beg you, save her!” The malnourished husband bangs his head more vigorously as he replies, his fresh blood flicking from the broken skin on his forehead. The wife can only sob uncontrollably with her forehead flat to the floor.

The physician narrows his eyes. “You get what you paid for.” The man closes his hand that's holding onto the coins and flicks his sleeve. “Tong!” The man throws 4 bronze coins to a youth standing to the side.

“Yes, master!” The youth steps forward after pocketing the coins, rummaging through his sorry-looking medicine bag before taking out a small medicine bottle.

“Wait, he’s the one that’s going to treat her?! That’s just asking for her to die, please, great Doctor, you can’t just watch her die.”

“Either you leave it up to Heavens, or you let him do it! Just to let you know, he can’t use anything over the worth of 4 bronze coins, if you want to leave it to ‘Heavens’, then I will give you back your money and you may leave!” The scholarly man says firmly. “Otherwise, even if his treatment fails, don’t come looking for us for revenge.”

[T/N: Tempted to change “Leave it to Heavens” to “leave it up to chance” since that’s the meaning, but keeping it cause of the flavour of the text~]

The wife starts wailing louder at the ultimatum while the husband grits his teeth before bowing to the youth. “Junior Tong, I leave it up to you!”

“Then scram!”

“Yes, Physician Li.” The man drags his wife bodily with bloodshot eyes, exiting the single room of the rowhouse.

With practiced hands, the scholar puts up white curtains on the windows and doors, sealing the exits by writing on the edge of the cloths with cinnabar. The youth vigorously shakes the medicine bottle before releasing the red-feathered cork, pouring the clear viscous liquid onto his palm. He rubs his fingers from his dominant hand into the palmful of medicine after putting the bottle away, coating them evenly before they air dry. Hesitantly, he reaches over and grabs the young girl’s wrist, checking her palpitation. After a while, he does the same to the side of her neck. Then finally, her face that’s slightly blue.

“Bitter plum skin, red dandelion, willow bark... no, make that poplar bark, corpse weed, pigwort, milk thistle, thorn nettle...”

[T/N: I believe these things are made up, so don’t go thinking they are real medicine :P]

“Wait!”

“Yes, master!”

“Why milk thistle and thorn nettle?”

“Aside from her fever, chronic malnutrition and weak lungs, heart and liver, I think she also ingested some sort of poison.”

“Poison?!” The man turns toward his apprentice with a quick 180. “Stand aside.”

“Yes, master!”

The man flicks his sleeve to reveal a knife-hand, vibrating slightly. The air inside starts to feel slightly warm, after a while, he places his index and middle fingers on her wrist, neck, behind the ear as well as the girl’s lower back before peeling the girl’s eyelids open one by one and inspecting her eyes.

“Replace corpse weed with silver hawthorne, ratio is 5,2,1,1,2,1,3.”

Tong stares blankly before asking “But isn’t silv-”

“Did you hear me or not?!”

“Yes! Master!”

“Then go! Send her parents in while you prep the medicine.”

“Yes!”

Tong immediately retrieves the necessary ingredients from his medicine bag, before going through his master’s to retrieve the more expensive and potent detoxifying herb. He quickly leaves the room and retrieves the couple, before

leaving again with the ingredients in tow.

The scholarly man stands ramrod straight, with his back towards the parents. After calming himself, he turns towards them with fire in his eyes. “Which one of you fed her opium-laced poisons?”

The husband and wife can only stare blankly at each other with their mouths dangling before looking back at the physician.

“Damn it all, it’s them again!” The scholarly man’s face distorts viciously as he hisses loudly, his fist clenched with white knuckles.

Chapter 7

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Chapter 7 - Disciple of Parvati, Disciple of Bhaisajyaguru 2)

Previously on Dao Ming...

A teenage Ming returns to a remote village somewhere. Tong has become an apprentice of a physician, who is currently trying to treat a girl who seems to be poisoned by people the physician knows. The Physician in question seems to have an idea as to who the culprits were.

“Did she suddenly bring home valuables? Did money suddenly show up from nowhere?” The Physician’s stern voice causes the two to shake like autumn leaves, struggling against the chilling wind.

“No, we are just lowly peasants, I don’t gamble or anything, we just want to live quiet, peaceful lives!” The husband replies with conviction.

The Physician turns to the wife who remains quiet. Noticing his gaze, the husband turns to her as well.

“You... don’t tell me...”

The wife shakes her head as she tries to recall something. “If I recall correctly... we had to pay less tax this year for some reason...”

“Less tax...? Are you sure?!” Physician Li kneads his brows while contemplating something, pacing slowly in the dilapidated room. After a while, he stops midstep, turning towards the distraught couple once more. “Don’t tell anyone else what you just told me, or else...”

“Or else...?”

“Or else your family, your friends, your relatives, and perhaps this entire area will be wiped out.”

“Ah, Little Yuu, Little Yuu, why must you be so unlucky...” The wife laments while stroking the unconscious girl’s head on the bed.

“Who... who would do this?” The smouldering flame in his eyes betrays the explosive anger he felt as he asks.

“The less you know, the better.” The scholarly man hides his hands into his sleeves. “Enough, just remember, not a word is to get out. Go outside and help my apprentice if you want your daughter to live.”

“Thank you, my Lord, thank you.” The wife bows repeatedly after getting up from the bed.

[T/N: Decided to use ‘my Lord’ for 大人 here, due to how honorifics work in chinese, it is kind of hard to properly convey this specific term since it’s quite fluid and occasionally depends on the relation between two people. Aside from addressing someone with respect - think flattery or occasionally ‘sama’ -, it can also mean someone generous, benevolent or of high social standing.]

“You, and your wife, treat your own wounds before evil spirits gets in.”

The pair bows before exiting the room with their heads down, with Physician Li reapplying the cinnabar script onto the curtain.

“Three years, a good three years, so you bastards are hiding behind an official... No wonder no one can find you, just you wait, you curs!” He grinds his molars before setting down some tools onto the table in the room, preparing the girl’s treatment.

[T/N: Was debating between curs/bastards, but curs won out cause it was used in high society in the west. They mean the same thing.]

...
...
...

“Tong, pay attention.”

“Yes, master!”

“We will be using Li-style Eighteen Needles. First 9 to treat, later 9 to stabilize.” The man grabs one needle from the set of silver needles on the bed that are securely fastened onto a blue silk cloth before holding the tip over a burning flame above his other hand. “Spirit Gate, Lesser Palace, Inner Pass, Cloud Gate, Lesser Shang, Yin Purse, Life Gate, Eight Winds, Eight Evils. Work from the heart out to the extremities, be careful when inserting at the Life Gate.” He pierces the needles one at a time at the designated spots after infusing Qi into them, causing them to vibrate as they pierce into her skin.

[T/N: Most of these shit looks legit, but I’m almost 100% sure the treatment is made up. Don’t want any wiseass jumping in with any claims, this will probably be the last warning on pseudo-medical shit.]

[E/N: Uh the needles, they do nothing (for like, non musculature problems)]

“Uh...” The girl stirs after a while, with her eyes fluttering open, a strange clarity can be seen in her eyes as she shifts them between the Physician and Tong - not moving her head.

“Calm down, I’m Physician Li, your parents asked me to treat you. You’ve suffered from prolonged poisoning, we are going to treat that right now.” He points toward the doorway, where the silhouettes of her parents can be seen through the curtain as they pace about. “If you understand, blink once slowly.”

The girl shifts her head slowly to look at the door, seeing the unmistakable figures of her short parents. The girl looks back up toward the standing man and the silent youth standing a short distance away, blinking once slowly.

“Good. Tong, feed her the medicine.”

The youth nods, tilting the clay herbal brew pot until a deep, dark liquid trickles out the spout into a porcelain bowl.

“Excuse me.” Tong bows slightly to the girl before walking up with the bowl in one hand, reaching for her back with the other hand, bringing her up into a sitting position. “This is very bitter, please bear with it.”

“Mmm.” The girl answers wordlessly.

Tong places the bowl on her lip, tilting it slightly to bring the dark liquid into her mouth. In return, she scrunches her face and forcefully swallows the medicine. In a few moments, her eyelids droop before closing completely, causing Tong to look at his master worriedly.

Physician Li places a finger on the girl’s wrist, taking her palpitation. He nods silently with a satisfied expression. “This is the expected effect. In this sequence, the patient will temporarily regain their wakefulness for a limited time. Remember to never do this to a possessed or excited patient.”

[T/N: Just letting you people know that possessed has dual meanings in the raw, it could mean literally possession as well as mental illness]

“Yes, master.”

“Now we will guide the medicine from the stomach to the heart, the heart to the brain, and brain to the liver.” He picks up another needle before burning it again with the flame from the center of his palm. “First is the Water Path, Qi Gate and connect it to Spirit Path, then...”

...

...

...

“Call in her parents.” Physician Li orders Tong while wiping the beads of sweat on his forehead as he takes some deep breaths. Silently, Tong complies, quietly walking to the curtain and pushing it aside, ushering the husband and wife pair inside.

“My Lord, how is she?”

“The acute poison is dealt with, when she does her business, there will be some discolouration. Also, Tong.”

“Yes.” The youth presents a cloth bag that shifts with a dry rustling sound, to which the Physician picks up and hands it to the wife.

“She will suffer withdrawals from the poison, put a handful of this into a bowl of rice and then cover it after filling the bowl with boiling water.”

“Withdrawals...”

“Don’t worry, it is just chamomile, lemon balm, and poppy seed.”

“Oh.” The husband answers before bowing deeply at the waist, his head completely facing the floor. “Thank you, benefactor, thank you.”

“This is just an exception of an exception, don’t tell anyone I am the one that cured your daughter. Don’t tell anyone what you told me, if anyone asks, just say a wandering physician came and did something you don’t understand, got it?”

“Yes, yes, of course.” The wife nods quickly after her husband’s reply.

“Tong, pack up.”

“Yes, master!”

Southstop City, Stone Moon Pavilion - Inn's second story Guestroom

“Tooong, go oar-oar-order another bottle.” The scholarly man orders with a flushed face, slamming the empty wine jar onto the table, rattling it.

“Master, I think that should be enough for one night, anymore would just harm your body. You won't be able to take your revenge if you get sick.” With quick hands, Tong presses down onto the jar that threatens to fall off the table and grasps it before placing it onto the ground.

The man sobers up quickly, his clouded eyes regaining their sharpness. “Right. Revenge...” The scholar suddenly sits up straight. “Wait, how did you know...”

“I might lack experience Master, but a dear friend of mine taught me that experience can be offset by relentless observation. You taking over the treatment, replacing the prescription with a more potent one at a greater cost, the warnings you gave to the couple, and the way you are acting now. This can only mean one thing.”

“Good. Good! That Old Ye sure picked up a good disciple.” The man fixes his ruffled clothing and starts to brew some tea.

[T/N: Old Ye is referring to the doctor from Tong's hometown that treated him when he stabbed himself, in case you've forgotten. When someone adds 'old' in front of someone else's name, it shows that they've a close relation of some sort.]

“Then...”

“Don't worry, I'll just make myself some 'alcohol dispersing tea'. Go to sleep early, we will be setting out to visit some old friends of mine first thing tomorrow.”

“If you need me, just call. Good night, master.”

“Good night.”

Tong softly leaves the room after placing the dozen or so wine jars near the door to the room, out of the way, then heading off to his own room next door. The scholarly man gets up with unsteady feet and walks towards the opened papered window, lifting his head up and looking out towards the overcast, night sky.

“The moon rabbit frolics in the night sky, only for the star pastures to be obscured by the wind and clouds. A lonely night, a lonely night.” The man shakes his head slowly in lamentation. “My wife, I will rip these weeds out by their root. I will be sure to find a cure afterwards. Just wait for me!”

[T/N: ‘Starry pastures’ is referring to the rest of the night sky]

Chapter 8

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Chapter 8 - Disciple of Parvati, Disciple of Bhaisajyaguru 3)

Previously on Dao Ming

Tong and his physician master treats a commoner girl and finds out that the ones that poisoned her were likely the same people that poisoned the physician’s wife at some point in the past, whose status we aren’t sure of.

Southstop City, Stone Moon Pavilion - Inn’s register

“Owner Yang, here’s our rent. A tael of silver and 52 bronze coin as agreed upon.” The scholarly man places the currency on the counter after checking the total twice over.

“Honoured Guest, Honoured Guest, we can’t accept your money.” The owner shakes his large, calloused hands in front of his chest.

The scholarly man narrows his eyes. “Are you saying my money is no good here?”

“Aiyah! Of course not, Physician Li! It’s just... I’m afraid the Heavens will smite me with lightning if I were to take the money of my benefactor!” The yellow-faced looking man explains with exasperation before pointing toward the clear, blue sky beyond the entrance of his inn.

[T/N: Yellowface has a dual meaning, it is used to indicate someone not feeling well, as well as an indication of liver diseases, had it as sickly, then pale, then finally went back to transliteration of it to keep the nuance due to the hints of his illness mentioned below]

“‘Personal relations are Personal, Business relations are Business’, your wife paid for your treatment, this and that are different transactions, there’s no need to drag them together, you still have your business to tend to.” Physician Li flatly refuses the excuse and pushes the currency to the center of the counter, right in front of the owner.

[T/N: 數還數,路還路 translates to ‘Bills are Bills, Ways are Ways’ is an idiom that means social capital and business shouldn’t mix, everything should be clear cut.]

“Haaa, then this Little Brother will just have to treat you to a meal the next time you visit!”

“There’s no need, just stay healthy. Farewell.” The physician dips his head into a nod before picking up a large medicine case cum backpack and wearing it on his back, leaving through one of the three pairs of wooden doors that serve as the entrance to the modest inn.

“Take care, Owner Yang. Remember, no overworking, and stay away from fatty food for at least 6 months.”

The owner looks at the physician that has already started walking down the street, then back towards Tong. “Little Benefactor, please accept these provisions for your voyage.”

“There’s no need, Ow-”

“Didn’t you hear what your master said, ‘Personal relations are Personal, Business relations are Business’? This is just a token of appreciation for saving me and my son’s life, had we waited like the other doctors suggested, we would be cripples by now.”

Tong makes a difficult face as he tries to refuse the gift.

“Hey, this is a life debt, no, two life debts, if you can’t even accept this much,

there's no way our conscience will let us have a night of sound sleep." The owner pats Tong on the shoulders before adding a cloth bundle to the other luggage that Tong is carrying at the end of a bamboo rod.

"Then on behalf of my Master, I thank the owner. Please take care of everyone's health."

"No need to be polite, by the time you two come back, we will be 'the picture of health'." The owner smiles while waving towards the teenager that's exiting the inn, who turns and bows lightly once before chasing after his master with quick steps.

[T/N: 龍精虎猛 translates to 'Dragon's Spirit Tiger's Might', meaning someone that's vigorous and healthy.]

"Haaiiii, a pity they aren't officials. Fair and righteous, with their skills, they can easily enter the Court or one of the Noble houses." The owner drops his sincere smile and replaces it with a business one as a customer comes over to settle his bills.

Mount Southswan, southern edge of Extreme Harmony province, Jade Wing Sect's main hall

"Godfather Li! Big Brother Tong!" A happy little boy limps his way toward the sitting duo with hopping, uneven steps, a wide smile plastered on his face.

""""Young Master!"""" The disciples cum servants greet the boy by saluting. Two dozens or so are stationed around the rectangular perimeter of hall, which sinks into the floor, 3 steps deep, as the main hall is also used as an arena for sparring. There are small ramps on each side of the sunken rectangle for ease of movement and transportation. Supporting the main hall, which is a fine structure of wood and masonry, stand large pillars, with motifs of various birds in flight and birds of prey engaging in hunting or combat.

“Ahahaha, Chunye, slow down, slow down.” The scholarly man laughs while getting out of the fine teak chair he’s sitting on to receive the 8-9 year old boy. Likewise, Tong stands up to offer his greetings.

““Ha!”” As soon as the boy gets within reach of Tong, he suddenly launches a lunge punch with a yell. From the side of the main hall behind Tong, a similar yell by a feminine voice came at the same time alongside a flying kick.

“Hup!” Tong takes a step back from the pincer attack and cranes his right wrist, raising it towards the leg aiming for his head. His left hand sweeps out from his chest, colliding against the boy’s wrist with the outside of his palm. Upon their impact, he twists both his hands and pulls both of them towards himself using their existing force while taking another step back, causing them to lose their balance and collide into one another, resulting in a pile of limbs.

““Omph!”” The voices let out groans as they try to untangle themselves on the floor.

“HAHAHAHAHA!” A booming laughter comes from the back entrance of the main hall. “See, Chunye, Chunlai, our Little Friend isn’t that easy to take down.”

“Hmph!” The teenager girl helps the boy up before turning her head to the side with her nose facing upward, away from Tong’s view.

“““Greetings, Sect Master!””” The disciples salute as the man walks out of the passage leading to the inner section of the sect, the bead curtain rattling softly as the burly man, dressed in a jade studded black robe embroidered with silver threads, walks through them into the main hall.

“Big Brother’s really good at martial arts, as always!” The young boy pats the dust off his pants while beaming. Physician Li smoothly starts checking the boy’s condition, by first diagnosing with palpitation before moving onto reflexology.

“Ah, please don’t make fun of me, ‘my skills are still half-baked’.” Tong turns and

bows slightly towards the approaching figure.

[T/N: 三腳貓功夫 translates to “3 legged cat kung fu”. In this context, he’s saying his skill is only superficial.]

“Hmph! If your skills are half-baked, then what does that make ours?” The girl pouts, obviously dissatisfied.

“Chunlai, mind your manners!”

“But dad!”

“No but! Your Brother Tong had traveled with Physician Li for two years now! In the meantime, you were too busy playing around in the back mountains to practice properly. Yet, you think you are better just because you inherit our sect’s exclusive arts?” The burly man’s deep voice gets more baritone towards the end of his scolding, causing the girl to lower her chin to her chest. “Also, did you greet Physician Li yet?”

“Chunlai greets Physician Li!” The girl obediently greets the scholar that is busy doing an examination of her younger brother. He nods in acknowledgment with a smile, while tilting the boy’s head back gently.

[T/N: Yes, she just referred herself in third person. Supposedly the ‘cutesy’ way to talk for girls.]

“Little Tong! When are you going to join us? With your foundation, you can easily become an Inner Disciple within a year!” The other disciples surrounding the hall share a silent look before shuffling their legs to regain their composure.

“I thank Sect Master Hong(洪), but I will have to decline as I wish to focus on the internal arts.”

“Old Hong, don’t try to steal our disciple every time.” Physician Li finishes up his examination and lets the boy go, who immediately starts asking Tong questions.

“He isn’t strictly your disciple, what’s the harm of having one more master?”

“Haaa, I’m only half his master, go ask Old Ye if you seriously want him to learn from you.”

“You said it!” The man turns back towards the direction he came from and gives a small shout. “Steward, release the pigeon!”

“Yes, Sect Master!” An old man, with faded gray robes, who stood unnoticed near the bead curtain appears like a ghost, before quickly and silently disappearing out the back entrance.

“You...!” The scholarly man points at the Sect Master with a stern look before sighing. “I don’t know whether to scold you or to praise you.”

“Ahahahaha! ‘A gentleman’s words are golden’! It’s too late for regret now.” The burly man laughs once more, heavily slapping onto the scholar’s back.

[T/N: 君子一言，快馬一鞭 translates to “Gentleman’s one word, fast horse one whip”, meaning ‘a gentleman’s word is as good as gold’]

“Che, I’ll let Old Ye deal with you!” The scholar’s eye narrows a little. “Did you manage to...?”

The Sect Master discreetly lifts his index finger before shifting his eyes towards the back of the hall. “Chunye, why don’t you show your Brother Tong how much you’ve progressed at the training hall?”

“.. like this?” The little boy poses into a strike after asking Tong for his opinion, before his father’s voice interrupts him. “Yes, father!” Without a pause, the boy pulls Tong by the sleeve towards one of the side entrances. The scholar looks at him and gives him a nod to indicate he should go with Chunye.

“Chunlai, you want to join them or listen to us old geezers talk?”

“Tong, xiao Ye, wait for me!” The teenage girl starts chasing the boys, who had a headstart.

Jade Wing Sect, Sect Master’s private office

“Steward, make sure no one comes disturb us.”

“Yes, Sect Master.” The old man closes the double door on the way out, then makes his way into the middle of the herb garden in front of the office. He takes a deep breath before breathing out slowly, his leg tensing in sync with his breathing, by the end of his exhalation, the soil underneath his feet sends up a small cloud of dust. Without further motion, the old man stands still in that one spot, with his senses sharpened in every direction, letting nothing escape his notice.

““Hmmm...”” The two men inside the office enjoy their cup of tea for a moment, savouring the light, sweet, bitter flavour.

clink

After putting the bowl of tea and saucer onto the table, the burly man gets straight to the point. “It was hard smuggling this in, those dog Officials have been trying to swallow up the whole production region.”

[T/N: He’s calling the official bitches for a lack of a better word, due to incompetency, corruption, abuses their powers, arrogant, etc... This terms comes up a lot, but dogs have a pretty low standing in chinese culture historically, on the same level as livestocks. So the disdain is pretty obvious :3]

“Sorry for the trouble, Brother Hong.” The scholar interlocks his fingers before saluting.

“Nonsense, when I was having trouble, no one but you and our band of brothers gave a damn.” The man waves one of his hands dismissively, before showing a

smirk. “By the way, the Pure Wood Sect tried to claim credit for suppressing the recent Scarlet Hive outbreak, Big Brother Ye’s juniors caught wind of it and revoked the sect’s tax and toll exemption status.”

Li just shakes his head. “This just goes to show you, the Righteous Sects and Deviant Sects are the same.”

“Ahahaha, I wouldn’t say that, Brother Li. At least the Deviant Sects aren’t hypocrites about it... Speaking of which, the Blood Moon Cult went all out in spreading the cure in the Red Water province, they even sent men into the White Jade Forest where Tong is from.”

“Seems like Tong’s friend is a wanted man... So I guess there’s still no word about him?”

“Sadly, no, White Jade Forest is filled with wild beasts and monsters, the edge of the forest has been surrounded, so there’s no way they left the forest. It’s a surprise his whole family is still alive in there somewhere.”

Physician Li nods in agreement, well aware of the various different Diviners that staked their lives on their claims. “Old Hong, I’m planning on wiping out the Poison Hand group.”

This causes the Sect Master to stand up abruptly. “You’ve located them?”

“Not quite, I know the area where they are working, so I just need to make some preparation to locate them.”

“Then...?”

“I’m going to have to leave Tong here until either Medic Officer Ye comes pick him up or I do.”

“Will Tong accept that...?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll tell him it’s for further training. And I wouldn’t be lying, Chunye’s rehabilitation plan will need someone to keep an eye on after I make some changes.”

A hopeful expression appears on the burly man’s face. “Rehabilitation?! Not recover?!”

[T/N: Yeah, rehab is slightly different from recover/heal. Rehab means working towards full functioning prior to the illness/injury. Recover means that the wound/illness is gone and no longer actively affects you.]

“Your son must have worked hard, his muscles are reforming at a rapid pace, combine that with his young age, I’m pretty sure I can get him to have at least 80% of his original mobility, if not a full cure.”

“Hahaha! Good! Good!” The burly man spreads out his arm while laughing, his face tilting backwards, making him face the ceiling.

“Don’t worry, Brother Li! I will make sure to take good care of Tong.”

The scholar narrows his eyes. “Just don’t teach him anything weird.”

“AHAHAHAHAHAHA!”

Chapter 9

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Chapter 9 - Disciple of Parvati, Disciple of Bhaisajyaguru 4)

Jade Wing Sect, somewhere in the back mountains

“Ahhhh!” A small yelp of pain echoes sharply in the hills.

“Let go of him!” The girl moves to get the teenager off the young boy that’s laying face down on the floor, with his arm pulled straight behind his back.

“No, ah! No, Big Sister, it’s fine, it feels good. Ah!” The young boy explains in between yelps, with his arms being pulled alternately and his trapezius muscle being squeezed rhythmically between the switch.

“Don’t worry, Little Miss, my master was extremely thorough in his guidelines, I won’t harm him. If you don’t believe me, you can go ask the Sect Master.” Tong explains matter-of-factly as he grips the boy’s right shoulder and firmly applies pressure with his fingers as he drags his hand back towards the boy’s elbow.

“You leave my dad out of this! I’m saying, are you good enough to treat my brother?!”

“Oohhh...” The boy groans comfortably as he feels the flow of blood coursing through his arms and shoulders.

“Why don’t you ask him?” Tong taps the boy’s shoulder after letting go of his arm, to indicate that he’s done. Chunye in turn rolls his head on the soft grass before turning over to face the sky with a loose expression.

“Why does it feel so good, Big Brother Tong?” The boy asks without opening his eyes.

“Think of it like this, you use your Yang energy in exercise, so your body builds up a type of Yin. Your muscle is the same as well, certain aspects of Yang allows the creation of the muscles, while parts of Yin destroy it. So what we are doing is bringing out the bad Yin as soon as possible and recharge your Yang with Qi and massage, it’s also why you get more hungry the more you exercise. So when you are hungry, you feel good after eating, right? It’s the same thing.”

The boy opens his eyes and look up at the clouds drifting in the sky. “I don’t really get it... but wouldn’t Dad or Big Sis gets stronger too if you do the same for them?”

Tong’s face freezes at that question, before pulling back and ponders the question. “This... this is something Master Ye and Master Li came up with, so I don’t really know.”

“Oh.” The boy pull his lips to one side before returning his face to normal, letting the matter drop.

[T/N: This is the “I am thinking about it but I don’t get it or can really think about it” look, not a grimace or anything like that. The lip is slightly puckered, if you watched any asian dramas, it’s that look.]

“Alright, when you are done resting, go eat and take a nap. You can join your apprentice brothers for some light training in the afternoon.” Tong walks towards the wicker basket laying at the foot of a large tree.

“Okay! Will you be joining us?” Chunye asks hopefully.

“Haha, I’m an outsider, Chunye, it wouldn’t be appropriate for me to be there.” He straps the basket to his back with ease before testing the tension of the strap by pushing it up and down with the hand behind his back.

“Oh.” The boy answers with slight disappointment.

“And where are you going?”

Tong can't help but sigh. "You aren't my steward, Little Miss. I'm doing what I need to be doing."

[T/N: Steward is used in a slightly derogatory way]

The girl stomps her foot with a 'Hmph' and a pout, then quickly starts pulling the arms of the boy to get him up.

"See if I care!" Chunlei sticks her tongue out while pulling down her eyelid before storming off with her helpless brother as he gets dragged away.

"Mischievous and stubborn..." Tong shakes his head as he remembers his own misdeeds when he was younger, walking off into the semi-wilderness of the back mountains.

??? Monastery, Void Knowledge Hall(空識堂), 1st floor's copying room

[T/N: 空識 sounds the same as 空色, which is a pretty important term in buddhism, not sure if it was intentional though, but I'm pretty sure.]

A simple, undecorated wooden building stands within a chaotic, untended garden next to a temple complex. The late morning sun streams into the crude, papered windows that line the building. Inside, monks of various ages are meditating upon, reading or copying the numerous scrolls stored within.

"Venerable Brother, what do these words mean?" Ming points to the complicated words on the bamboo scroll, set upon a table that's been smoothed to an extreme through ages of use.

"Hm...? It eh..." The young-adult monk closes his eyes in concentration, while the teenager waits patiently for his response. "This means fecund, you might know it as fertile."

[T/N: 饒沃 was the word used while 肥沃 was the explanation. Even if you don't know chinese, you can tell that the

first one is more complicated. The latter is the common term used by laymen while the former don't see much use aside from older literature. Kinda had to make do with it in english.]

“Oh, thank you, Venerable Brother.” Ming continues reading the scroll carefully with a steady hand as to prevent himself from accidentally damaging it.

The slightly older monk nods before returning to his task, grinding the ink stone in circular motion over the dense, pitch black plate. Happy with the amount of ink pooled, he dips the boar-hair ink brush into it before copying the content of the old scroll in front of him onto the new scroll under his other hand.

In the six years since Ming has arrived, he has been reading here whenever he can, with intervals between each sessions shrinking noticeably as the work he provided had helped the monastery increasingly in procuring material for self-sustenance and maintenance. Like most other monasteries, the institution focuses on self reliance and services, while subsidized with donations. This particular monastery can be said to be far from the civilized world, built upon a far flung mountain range where learned men, pilgrims, noble warriors, and others would appear sporadically throughout the year, bearing wax goods and other practical goods as offerings. This has been a tradition for so long, that written records no longer exists, it is only through oral traditions that this fact is still known.

[E/N: Oral traditions last much, much longer than any other form of human communications]

“Why would anyone care about some monastery hidden away from the world?” is a thought that often appears in the mind of the apprentices that accompanied their masters to this small, desolate monastery. Many apprentices would complain, many would be sullen, even more would look down at the monks and the entirety of the monastery upon their arrival. The few that offered to do the mundane chores, those that paid more than just lip service, those that would cleanse their mind and body of the red dust with the dusts that line the scrolls and steles, they would see more than the written works stored in the hall.

[T/N: Red dust is referring to the desires and temptation of the mundane world.]

“‘Suffering’, suffering is the bondage from ignorance. To overcome suffering and seek the gate of Nirvana, knowledge is the necessary key.”

“Greatness can only come from the blood that supports you.”

“An eternity of change, an unchanging eternity.”

“To be ‘selfless’, one must become ‘selfish’.”

“Vegetable steam bun is life.”

“Wealth is wasted on the wealthy.”

“Anatta, all things are transient. There are no ‘self’ in all of existence. To wallow in the impermanent is to drown in suffering.”

“The chains of kinship prevents one from greatness.”

“Atman, all things have their ‘true self’. To know something, requires that something to be acknowledged and understood.”

“Life, is too short a journey. Death, is too long a rest.”

...

...

...

Hundreds upon hundreds of steles were left by past visitors, lining the unkempt garden, seemingly profound, seemingly nonsensical, seemingly contradictory to one another. The monastery would accept one stele from anyone that chiseled it within their complex; when they are done, they would be placed randomly in the garden where they are exposed to the elements and unmaintained by the monks. In addition, one written offering can be included in the Void Knowledge Hall, where monks stationed there would make copies upon copies of the work in the hall throughout the ages in a cycle, with the old copy ritualistically dismantled and burned, before their ashes are scattered upon the wind. That’s of course, assuming the copy survives long enough to the next cycle as no maintenance is provided against damage nor wear and tear. Both the stele and written offering can be accepted once per a lifetime. From the monastery’s point of view, the Void Knowledge Hall is viewed as a public service to be a repository of knowledge to help ease the suffering of man, as well as a form of mandala for the monks.

[T/N: From what I can gather, mandala is an aid to meditation. I'll ramble later in the comments since I'm not sure of... a lot of things from my research, it was a fun read nevertheless.]

Some visitors see it as the best place to keep their legacy, as the location is likely to stand through the ages since no army could reach that desolate location nor would any country fight for it. Other scholars see it as an Immortal's or a bodhisattva's gift to be honoured, due to the inexplicable events that pop up. There were occasions where visitors would encounter one another, either en-route or at the monastery, only to find out they were from parts of the world the other party never knew existed, yet their journey time from their respective points of origin would make that impossible.

[T/N: Bodhisattva can be thought of as mortal trying to become a buddha due to their compassion for all sentient beings. Think of a cultivator in a typical CN trying to hit the next stage/become immortal/become a god, but instead of doing martial arts or whatever, he cultivates his mind/spirituality and knowledge instead.]

Inside the tranquil copying room, the monks continue their task of copying the scroll while muttering them quietly.

ka

One of the monks suddenly drops his brush, his eyes closed and backs away from the table that he is working at, slowly collapsing to the floor. Ming, the local herbalist, the local bone doctor and the monk who assisted Ming in reading immediately get into action. Ming flies towards one of the walls where prayer mats are stacked, the locals removed the surrounding furniture and the monk reaches out with one hand before leaping off the floor to catch his falling colleague. Ming dashes right by and slides the prayer mat underneath the monk before running out the front door. The two locals look at one another after clearing out the area, sure that everything is out of the way. Unable to control themselves, they turn towards the table where the entranced monk was working and stare at the scroll that he was copying.

Chapter 10

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Chapter 10 - Disciple of Parvati, Disciple of Bhaisajyaguru 5)

Errr... sorry guys, I know EC is supposed to come up next, but I was stuck at the hospital for most of the week starting from last weekend. I could work on DM during my down time, so I did just that. EC chap is almost done though, so, assuming the weather cooperates, will be posting that in a day or two.

Enjoy~

???, Hall of Calm Intent(平意堂)

“Boss, boss!” Ming storms into the meditation hall that’s currently in use, breaking all the junior monks’ concentration. Row upon row of monks slowly open their eyes, their robes looking like a field of rapeseed being harvested as they turn to look at the source of the disturbance. The young monks-in-training shift minutely as they try to cast-off the unpleasant thoughts that come about when one is disturbed.

THWACK

An old monk that served as a proctor for the monks-in-training smacks the bundled bamboo in his hand across Ming’s shoulders. “How many times did I tell you not to call me that?! I have a name, you know!”

The other proctors turn to the man, silently wondering to themselves. “Is that the first thing you should be angry about? Not the disturbance?”

“But calling you ‘Master Zingsum(静心 - Calm Heart)’ feels weird, you are neither calm nor patient, and I’m pretty sure calling you a ‘Master’ is wrong as well!” The younger monks struggle to suppress their laughter, some choking in the process; the other proctors cough or turn away, trying to hide the look on their face.

The old monk takes several deep breaths to forcefully calm himself. “What do you want? You are interrupting us.” The voice is slightly strained as he tries to keep it as flat and neutral as possible.

“One of the brother monks responsible for calligraphy might be ‘awakening’.” Ming gets right to the point since there are no longer any distractions.

“You should’ve said that sooner!” The old monk takes long strides towards the back-stairs, quickly disappearing from sight.

“For now, focus on solo-endeavours, don’t slack off, it could be one of you that awakens in the near future if you stay diligent.”

The many dozens of monks calm themselves and restore their composure, some continue their meditation, others exit the hall to complete other tasks.

???, Void Knowledge Hall, 1st floor’s copying room

“Smelly old geezer, do you understand this?” The old bone doctor asks after rolling the scrolls back and forth, scanning through its content. The rest of the monks in the copying room are peeking over his back.

[T/N: I know “smelly old geezer”(臭老驃) and “old bone freak”(老骨怪) sounds weird, but we couldn’t think of better names in english T.T E/N: ENGLESKI HARD. GAMBURGA.]

“What is there to understand, you old bone freak?” The herbalist carefully rolls up the scroll and places it back onto the table. “It’s just a farmer’s almanac, the village’s record, harvests and inventories over the years.”

A frail-looking, withered old man with numerous liver spots appears silently in the room, taking the scroll and placing it onto a half empty shelf. Likewise, Ming takes the partially copied scroll and puts it right next to where the original is now placed.

“Mister Chotin (草填先生 - Mister Grass Fill), if it’s that simple, then do you know why this was left here?” The short youth rebuts.

[T/N: 先生 used in this case is exactly how it would be used in Japanese for sensei, to be accurate, this is where sensei originated from.]

“Ah, you damned brat, what do you know?” The old man turns towards the youth’s voice, straightening out his back and arching his brows as he comes face-to-face with the frail-looking monk. He quickly recovers by making a quick nod, which the monk returns amiably. Likewise, the surrounding monks recognize their grandmaster and nod their heads in acknowledgment. Unlike the sects of the outside world where decorum and etiquette play an important role in regards to one’s face, the monks here focus more on raising one’s ability and just observing the basic manners.

“I know nothing, that’s why I’m here.” Ming answers with a deadpan expression as though it’s obvious.

“You!” The gray-haired herbalist points a shaking finger at Ming.

“Give it up, smelly old geezer, you will just throw out your back again.”

The herbalist twists his lip for a moment before settling down.

“Guk!” The entranced monk chokes on a breath, a look of pain appears on his face, causing everyone to stop talking.

“Yangching(陽清 - Sun Clear), don’t try to force it, just let it be. Make use of the knowledge, don’t let it make use of you.” The ancient looking monk mutters in a

soft, deep, raspy voice. His hand moves slowly, deliberately across the struggling monk's back, preventing any mental backlash by soothing his tense body and calming his mind.

[T/N: 走火入魔 is being used in its original meaning in taoism and in older wuxia that focused heavily on meditation. Not Qi Deviation or the like used in xianxia. 走火 means run (through) fire, refers to the practice of whatever it is, which can be borderline harmful to you, 入魔 means "entering (the) evil", it means becoming obsessive or being processed by a demon, in short, psychosis/mental illness. Originally, it had absolutely nothing to do with qigong, it's something that's relatively recent that was attached to this term by modern authors. E/N: Think insanity induced by a bad trip on hallucinogens]

The monk's breathing returns to normal as a sheen of sweat appears over his forehead.

"Ming, where are they at right now?" The ancient monk asks while monitoring his disciple.

"They are copying the agriculture and census... I think?" Ming tilts his head to one side while looking up, not exactly sure.

"Master Taiheng(太興-Great Emotion), he was going through a village's record I believe." The herbalist offers.

The ancient monk nods slowly, keeping his hand on the young monk's back.

"Ming, for the next couple of weeks, can you stop your normal duties and support Yangching along with Yangchun(陽春 - Sun Spring)?" Just at that moment, Zingsum and some of the other proctors appear just outside of the hall, some of them looking slightly out of breath.

The monk who was teaching Ming how to read earlier smiles with a wide grin, while the other monks turn to look at Ming in curiosity. In the past, anyone going through the 'awakening' needs someone to keep an eye on them due to the fear of mental instability. A mortal is a mortal, even if one were to become a bodhisattva. They may have a glimpse of the dao from the accumulation of knowledge and comprehension in accordance with their bodhicitta; but they still have to come to terms with their own limitations, and how they may dedicate

themselves to help others. This often mean confusion, frequently asking questions as thoughts race within their mind, and what effects would occur should they apply their knowledge. This also means that whomsoever accompanies the individual, they may also gain insight towards their own awakening. But, as far as the younger monks know, Ming isn't one of them.

[T/N+A/N: 菩提心 -> Bodhicitta is the mindset for one to discard one's self and to express empathy and compassion towards all sentient beings. While it may sound noble, it can be filled with a lot of dark undercurrents (thank gods for author's note). Here's an example, as provided by the author, there's a worm that burrowed out of the ground, there's a starving chick that fell from the nest. You can save the worm by guiding it back into the soil, or you can save the bird by feeding it the worm. In buddhism, they get around this by using the karma realms. The bird is on a higher realm than the worm, so there would be no problem with just saving the bird. But, now, let's say you've found two identical twins in a desert, you can only carry one of them out, and whoever remains will certainly die. Who do you save? They will suffer no matter what happens. Or, would you kill them both? I'll have to note that, the example given, most buddhist sects don't accept any sort of mercy killing, killing is wrong, period. There are some sects that do have mercy killing though, an aspect of Guan Yin is depicted as a ferocious warrior, stomping on the skulls of demons and enemies. So, it isn't a concrete thing, just thought I'd share the fruit of my research :P I think what the author's note is hinting at is, it's possible for someone to come to the conclusion that to be compassionate to all living things is to kill all living things. Tl;dr, skynet might just be filled with compassion~]

One of the proctors interjects, “But Brother Wingmuk (永目 - Eternal Sight), should we send one of the senior-brother monks? This would be a wasted opportunity since this is the first awakening in over 15 years, surely that would be more beneficial for everyone.” This causes most of the monks to knit their brows.

“Haa, Seonzik (信直 - trust straight), ah, Seonzik.” The grandmaster sighs with a tinge of disappointment. “‘Awakening’ isn't the only way to help the world, I have never awakened to a Dao, neither did you, nor some of your senior-brothers. Does that mean the things we've done are wasted? Of the many physicians that roam this land, are their efforts in vain?”

The proctor closes his eyes in appreciation, ruminating on those words.

“Haa, I might as well tell you all since those looking for Ming will reach here eventually. He has already saved at least 897 villages, 43 towns, and 3 provinces. It's probably more than that by now.”

All but a few monks widen their eyes while Chotin squints his eyes - mumbling, causing the the bone doctor to elbow him in the ribs.

“Brat!” The herbalist brushes off his friend’s elbow and tightly grabs Ming by the shoulders. “You were the one that found the cure to the ‘Scarlet Hive’!”

“Scarlet...” Ming tries to recall the somewhat familiar name. “Oh! That time when everyone got sick. No, it wasn’t me, it was Little White and Little Cloud.”

Chotin jerks his head back slightly, obviously confused.

“They are the grandma’s goats.” The youth offers, seeing the herbalist’s dazed look.

“That doesn’t matter, become-”

“I know what you are thinking, Mister Chotin, I’m sad to say, Ming has no talents in the pharmaceutical arts. It’s also true that he got the cure from the goats, a senior monk from Peace Moon Forest(安月林) who was shown the method said as much.” Zingsum cuts off Chotin’s invitation to Ming to become his disciple.

“Damn it! I’ve seen this brat all these years and I didn’t even know this?! And he says he knows nothing?! Ah Heavens! My eyes are wasted!”

[T/N: 老天爺 - means old sky grandpa, I just used Heavens as replacement since that’s what it’s referring to, just noting this down cause the way he’s saying heaven is a mix of lamentation and exasperation. 有眼无珠 - have eyes, but no eyeballs, just changed it to my eyes are wasted to keep it smooth]

“Ah Cho (familiar way of calling Chotin), what is this ‘Scarlet Hive’?” The shocked monks also turn their heads towards the herbalist.

“We know it as the ‘Small Red Devil Plague’!” Chotin says through clenched teeth as he reluctantly lets go of Ming’s shoulders, as though he’s a robber being forced to put back a piece of heavenly jade.

The monks that recovered from the earlier surprise drop their jaws at this revelation as they've all heard about the disease, and have even seen it mentioned in one of the scrolls on occasion. The devastation it brought usually meant a death sentence for the region, not to mention the fact that a cure hasn't been found since records of it appeared, centuries ago.

"Brother Wingmuk, do the other senior-brothers know about this?" One of the other proctors recovers quickly. "We should nurture Little Ming... The amount of good he can do for the world is..." A shiver runs down the proctor's spine, while others have tears in their eyes.

"Ming isn't one of us, he has no obligations to do so." Zingsum answers in place of the grandmaster. "And if you haven't noticed, most of the uncommon material for the medicine we used and refined were gathered by Ming."

"Damn it, Zingsum, so that's why you wouldn't let Ming work for me!" The herbalist complains with a huff.

"What are you complaining about? If it wasn't for Ming who was so picky about the consistency of the willow bark, you wouldn't even have willow bark crystal powder to use in the first place." The old monk laughs lightly. "And plus, Ming should do what Ming wants to do, his parents also said as much."

[T/N: My inner nerd is screaming... ASPIRIN PRECURSOR. For those not familiar with chemistry or medicine, willow bark alone was highly unstable, so much that it was hard to control the dosage. The correct isolation of salicin, which is the active medical ingredient in the willow bark, was what made what we now know as aspirin possible.]

"Ming, what do you want to do anyways?" The bone doctor asks.

"I want my mom, dad, and little sister to be happy. Oh, also you, Mister Bacsuk (百熟 - Hundred Familiar), the villagers, and ah, um... grandma and the people from the other village too."

Grandmaster Wingmuk smiles slightly towards some of the proctors as everyone hears the youth's answer. "In addition to Yangchun, I am also thinking of asking

Junior Brother Tungmak(銅脈 - Bronze Vein) to watch over and train the two.”

The older monks nod slowly, finally understanding what their senior-brother is intent on doing. The younger monks are excitedly talking to one another and teasing Yangchun, since their famed Master-Uncle is going to personally train him.

Chapter 11

Great Merchant - Dao Ming (Chapter 11 - Disciple of Parvati, Disciple of Bhaisajyaguru 6)

Er... yeah... about EC. Sorry, I wanted to read more dao ming and I didn't have the brain/creativity to do the rewrite properly for the EC chapter (it was cringeworthy, it's my first solo chapter contribution, I'd slap my past self if I could =.=) Enjoy dao ming, didn't expect the sudden jump, but now I just want more >.>

Also, Happy Canada's Day for those that had sunshine! (We had rain here, the BBQ... T.T)

Just going to slap this here and see how shameless some of these fuckers are, whoever copy and paste this on another site. It was stolen from ecwebnovel.blogspot.ca which is the sole location authorized by the copyright holders, so bugger off.

4 years later

Jade Wing Sect, Dueling Grounds

“Go, Chunye! Kick his ass!” An energetic, blossoming young lady cheers from the front rows of the stands. A few of the disciples guarding the perimeter of the arena sneak peeks at her youthful, alluring form. The leading members of the sect smile softly as they sip their tea, watching the fight unfolding on the stage.

““Ha!”” ““Ha!”” A handsome youth, dressed in a green uniform embroidered with a hawk, lunges towards another youth, dressed in a similar outfit save for

the blue colour and the cloud-like embroidery.

The initial right-hand lunge fist gets parried to the side with a sweeping motion with the defending youth's leading hand, pushing it away from slightly behind the wrist. Before he can counterattack with his trailing hand, the attacking youth lowers his body by crossing his legs unexpectedly and flowing with the force of the block and the momentum of his lunge.

DUP

Like a compressed spring, the attacking youth's lowered body bounces upward sharply from the unnaturally close distance, striking the other youth's collarbone with an elbow. Unwilling to just receive the attack one-sidedly, the defending youth sends out a low kick against the other's back leg. As though expecting it, the arm with the elbow strike extends outward and grasps the youth's face with an inverted backhand, with his middle finger firmly in the ear.

FWOOSH

The low kick lands solidly, but with the sudden shift in weight forward, the attacking youth's back leg had no resistance to the kick, dissipating most of the damage. With the defending youth's precarious balance, the attacking youth forcefully pushes down with his right hand while stepping forward with his kicked leg, smashing down with his winded up left hand, causing the defending youth to fall backward with a *THUD*, facing towards the sky.

The face of the laid out youth stiffens as the sunlight is blocked by a leg that's rapidly descending towards his head.

KLUNG

The foot lands next to the youth's head, creating large cracks in the thick stone tiles that make up the stage. The youth on the floor continues to stare at the leg with wide eyes, obviously a little shaken.

“The winner, Young Master Chunye of the Jade Wing Sect!” A middle-age man announces loudly as he walks onto the stage, enthusiastic applause pouring down from 3 sides of the square stage. A few elders of the Jade Wing Sect clap slowly, with a displeased look on their face.

“Thanks for the pointers, big brother!” Chunye pulls the downed youth up with one hand, showing a big smile.

“Ah, um, yes, thank you.” The other youth stutters out a reply before quickly running down the stage with his head down and a cramped face.

As the youth proceeds back to the section where his sect is seated at during this Youth Pointer Exchange Gathering... “Che! Senior-brother, how can you lose to some cripple? Do you have any face left?” Another youth sneers as soon as he gets within ear shot, his voice loud enough for everyone to hear as the applause dies down, causing everyone’s attention to fall onto him.

“What?! This Young Master is saying the truth and you all know it! That damn kid is a cripple, so what if he can swing his fists and legs a little better now! If it wasn’t for his underhanded techniques, how would disciples from our righteous Blue Cloud sect lose to him?!”

“Little Lam(南 - south), you are going too far. Apologize.” The dignified man sitting next to the youth admonishes without force, merely paying lip service while shrewdly endorsing the youth’s words.

The youth twists his lips and rolls his eyes while making a sloppy salute with a cupped fist. “This Young Master’s words might have been offensive, please forgive my straight forwardness.”

“Forgive your granddad! You call that an apology?!” Chunlai jumps forward from her seat, putting a hand on her hip while pointing at the youth with the other. “Young Master, Young Master, what Young Master? All I see is a horse-faced,

triangle-eyed, hippo-eared, fish-lipped, elephant-nosed, damned-monkey spirit, not a part of you looks human, let alone the semblance of a Young Master!”

A sect elder nearby sprays out the mouthful of tea that he was drinking, her father covers his face with one hand, the other elders turn away in embarrassment or try to suppress their laughter, as their torsos shake visibly. The rest of the audience aren’t as reserved as they hold their stomach in laughter, causing their respective sect elders to try and calm them down half-heartedly.

Who doesn’t love drama? Especially when it involves other sects? Everyone not involved knows they are in for a good show, who doesn’t know the firecracker heir of the Jade Wing sect? The last time the Bright Snow sect tried to matchmake her with their heir-apparent, she nearly crushed the boy’s family jewels for slapping one of her sect’s disciple for not bringing the tea fast enough. And now you want to pick on her brother?! You are seeking death! Even your ancestors wouldn’t want to deal with this tigress!

“Wh-what did you just call me?” The youth stutters as he brings his hands to feel his own facial features. His father, the sect leader, scowls with a dark face, disappointed at his son’s lack of rebuttal.

“Not looking like human, not looking like spirit, might as well call you a freak!”

[T/N: 人不像人, 妖不像妖, 只能稱呼你為人妖! - translates as “human not looking like human, spirit not looking like spirit, (we) can only call you a “freak”!, the freak here also has a connotation of being androgynous, so yeah, she’s saying he’s not a man... nor a woman, and with the physical descriptions, not really human either, www]

The laughter only gets louder as the disciples of the Blue Cloud sect look at each other anxiously.

“Hmm! So the cripple has to hide behind a woman now?” One of the wittier elders cuts in to try and save some face.

“Cripple this, cripple that. What do you call your fellow disciple that lost to him,

then?" A heavily tanned youth strolls out from the crowd that's next to the Blue Cloud's section.

"Damn kid, which sect are you from? Didn't your elders teach you any manners?"

"Exchange Disciple of the Jade Wing Sect, Li Hou Tong."

"Che, what exchange disciple? Only a half-baked sect will have such a half-baked rank! You dare to interrupt me?!"

Tong was originally a bully; it was just that he realized his errors and reformed after spending time with Ming. Incidentally, having to deal with the entitled brat that's Chunlai all these years, his true nature surfaced again, albeit within bounds of civility this time around.

"Wow! Your sect still has the face to say that?! I sincerely apologize that your sect's Young Master is a freak and one of your elders has gone senile." He makes an exaggerated, effeminate curtsy sarcastically, silencing the crowd for a moment before they react festively again. He drops his joking demeanor and returns to a neutral expression. "My masters and I already completely cured Chunye, are you trying to say we are incompetent?"

The elder's face darkens as he shifts his eyes, trying to recall all the famous physicians in the region.

"Speaking of manners, since you want to talk manners, I do believe you'd still have to address me as 'Mister', no?" Tong didn't let up before looking up at the sun and squinting, bringing out a fan to cool himself.

"Hmph! Just cause you say you are a physician, we should believe you?!" The elder doesn't recall a physician this young, thus determining that the youth is bluffing.

“Aiyah, is your dementia kicking in again? You can just ask Chunye you know.” Tong dismissively taps his temple before pointing towards the Jade Wing section. “Haaa, you know what, I don’t want to argue with someone senile, it just isn’t right. Let me talk with your freak, err... I mean your Young Master Ham... I mean umm... Lam?” He does the exaggerated curtsy once more, causing the entirety of the Blue Cloud sect to stare at him with daggers in their eyes. The rest of the onlookers are grinning, with some that had close relationship with the Jade Wing sect shaking their heads.

“Hmph! Damn feeble scholars, all you can do is mouth off! Yeah! I’m calling you incompetent, your master is incompetent, and your master’s master is incompetent! Pei! If you have the nerve, get on the stage with me!”

Tong makes a show of being scared, playing up the crowd. “Well, if you insist.” He shrugs his shoulders, closes his fan and walks up to the stage, making a proper salute to the referees before settling on a spot.

“““PFFT!””” The inner disciples and the brother-sister pair has to control themselves, causing all but a few of the sect elders to look at them with harsh eyes.

The already fuming Young Master storms up the stage with a rage, his red face burning. “I’m going to make you regret this!”

“Sorry, but I don’t swing that way.”

Even the audience is starting to feel sorry for the Young Master at this point.

“You better be a good physician, because you are going to be crippled by the time I’m done with you.”

“Ah, wait, wait.” He waves at one of the referees to come over to them.

“It’s too late for you to back out now.” The Young Master answers with a scowl.

“Oh, no, no, I’m just making sure, you said Little Ye used underhanded tricks right?”

“So what?”

“So, I’m asking, what is considered underhanded.” He directs a hand to the referee to indicate he should listen in.

The question momentarily confuses the youth as even he knows Chunye didn’t do anything wrong. As a last resort, he just blurts out. “The face grab!”

“Ah, okay, so strikes only.” Tong looks at the referee, who nods to affirm that he heard it.

“Okay, ready when you are, freak.”

“BASTARD!” The Young Master screams as he launches a flurry of attacks, which Tong parries with ease by slapping them down.

After a while, he starts singing in tune with the parries. “Hit the fly, hit the fly, kill the freaking annoying fly.”

Huff Huff

The initial burst of energy Lam showed has already died down, with him taking deep breaths.

“Oh, you are done? Guess it’s my turn.” Tong flicks his hands as he rolls his shoulder, causing Lam to look at him with a dumbfounded expression.

“A slap to the left, a slap to the right, a slap down the forehead to set the dumb kid straight.”

“A punch to the left, a punch to the right, give the bastard a pair of panda eyes.”

“A palm to the left, a palm to the right, let’s see if we can turn you into an elephant.”

[T/N: The last line is a pun, palm and elephant sounds the same. Yeah, I tried to keep the rhyme, it doesn’t sound as smooth in english though... T.T]

As soon as Tong stops attacking, the Young Master stumbles forward, leaning on his shoulders. “Aiyah! I accidentally called you salt(Ham), you don’t have to give me salted pork feet (Ham Ji Sao - perverted hands).” Tong gestures the referee on the stage who seems to be in a daze. After snapping out of it, he quickly rushes forward to support the barely recognizable youth.

“The winner is Mister Li, Li Hou Tong!” The referee announces the result right away, gesturing for the competition physician to come up. The armrests that were on the chairs the leaders of the Blue Cloud sect are seated in are crushed to dust with a *pluff*, their eyes glaring at Tong.

“Here, use this.” Tong lightly tosses a small porcelain bottle with a yellow feather stopper to the physician who’s rushing up to the stage. “Don’t worry, he’s just swollen and dizzy, he will be fine. Just consider this beating his medical fee.”

The physician immediately pulls open the stopper to inspect the medicine, since he can’t easily trust the medication that is not made by himself. The heavy, pungent smell assaults his nostrils, a thick emulsion of some sort sticks to the bottom of the stopper where a stem extend deep into the bottle. “Seohong Oinment?”

Tong nods as he casually walks towards the Blue Cloud’s section of stage. “Is this good enough for you? What did you say about righteousness and underhandedness again?” He mocks the elder that was mouthing off earlier, causing his ears to go red.

“Little brat, don’t go too far, at least give your elders some face.” The sect leader warns with a cold expression.

“Going too far? Face is something others give you, dignity is something you lose yourself. Who said Chunye is still a cripple? Who here didn’t think we physicians are incompetent?” Tong sweeps his eyes at the elders and disciples, forcing them to evade eye contact. The elder who overestimated his own wittiness can only stare at the tiles. “Don’t say I am not doing my job, here.” The tanned youth tosses a small satchel towards Chunye’s previous opponent while maintaining his eye contact with the sect master. “Boil this with some salt water and gargle your mouth for the next week or so, same with your drinking partner. You two should stop going to the brothels so much, at least wait until the disease clears up.”

[T/N: The drinking partner should be pretty obvious...]

The disciple’s face turn pale as the Blue Cloud sect master snaps his head in his direction, with his eyes wide, he slowly shifts his eyes to some of the elders, who lower their heads in shame.

Satisfied, Tong walks towards the Jade Wing section, fanning himself as he squints at the blazing sun once more.

“Big Brother Tong, that was way too stylish!” Chunye was the first one to welcome Tong, jumping right onto his back. “What was that earlier? You just swept back and forth, even the strike.”

“That was the Goshawk strike sequence.”

“Isn’t that just a basic form... it can be used like that?” The inner disciples that overheard, question each other as though they must have heard it wrong.

“Little Tong.” Sect Master Hong says with a stern voice. “Apologize to Blue Cloud sect master, you went a little too far.” The burly man gives him a wink to express his true feelings, making it clear that he’s doing the admonishment just for appearances. The Righteous sects had always made fun of Jade Wing for having a cripple as one of the heirs, now that ‘the carp has leapt through the dragon’s gate’, it’s his turn to rub it in their face.

Tong spreads his hands wide, almost into the position of a curtsy, making the audience hold their breath. After a moment's delay, he instead cups his fist and salutes towards the Blue Cloud section. "This weak, humble apprentice got a little hotheaded, I ask that you elders will overlook any transgressions."

The Blue Cloud sect leader storms off forcefully, shattering the already broken chair.

"Hmph, taking advantage of my brother? Not in this life!" Chunlai declares while tilting her head back, her nose up, looking down upon the Blue Cloud personnel.